

Places, Please!

**The First
Anthology
of Lesbian
Plays**



**Edited by
Kate McDermott**



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PLACES, PLEASE!

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*The First Anthology of
Lesbian Plays*

EDITED BY
KATE McDERMOTT

spinsters | *aunt lute*

1985

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Acknowledgments

"Without whom" statements in books always seemed predictable, extravagant, and unnecessary to me, but that was before I edited this anthology. The "without whoms" for me and this anthology are: All the playwrights who submitted scripts, Sharon Jenkins, Joan Pinkvoss, Beth Collins, Barb Wieser, Ellen Bass, Patty Paludan, Ann Bennett, Kate Miller, Bettina Aptheker, and me. This project also benefitted from the help and support of Mary K. Martin. One other who helped: Tom Hutcheson.

My thanks to Adrienne Rich for granting permission to use the "Women and Honor" excerpt from *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence, Selected Prose, 1966-1978*.

My thanks to May Sarton for granting permission to use the quote from *Journal of a Solitude*.

Also I wish to mention a special thanks to W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., who facilitated the above permissions.

An abiding gratitude to Tillie Olsen, who told a truth in *Silences*, thus clearing a space in my mind for this book.

"My own belief is that one regards oneself, if one is a serious writer, as an instrument for experiencing. Life—all of it—flows through this instrument and is distilled through it into works of art. How one lives as a private person is intimately bound into the work. And at some point I believe one has to stop holding back for fear of alienating some imaginary reader or real relative or friend, and come out with personal truth. If we are to understand the human condition, and if we are to accept ourselves in all the complexity, self-doubt, extravagance of feeling, guilt, joy, the slow freeing of the self to its full capacity for action and creation, both as human being and as artist, we have to know all we can about each other, and we have to be willing to go naked."

—May Sarton, *Journal of a Solitude*

This Book Is Dedicated

to all the women who share life with me, especially to my mother, **Agnes Clark McDermott**, who, wanting to birth the child — hoping for a daughter — and warned that she might “lose the child,” remained five months in bed and then gave me life to share; who, finally, after forty years, found the moment and the words and told me that story.

PLACES, PLEASE!

TRADITIONAL THEATER USAGE

The stage manager's call to alert the actors to assume their places, to begin the play.

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HONOR THE PLAYWRIGHT

A Reminder About Theater Ethics

Think of playwrights as an endangered species—like California condors, or Bengal tigers, or humpback whales—they need support and consideration. Please give it to them.

If you choose, and I hope you will, to produce any of the plays in this collection, contact the playwrights for permission to produce and also for information about the royalty fee schedule. An address is provided with each play.

I mention this because several of these playwrights told me of “pirated” productions of their plays which they learned about inadvertently. They were never asked for permission to produce, and of course were not paid royalties for the performances. These events may have happened due to ignorance or conscious neglect, but in either case the end result was the same: the playwright’s work was not acknowledged and she didn’t get paid.

Established playwrights don’t have these problems. Their interests are guarded by agents, by “watch dog” clipping services, and by attorneys who file suit in civil court against “pirated” productions, or any breach of copyright laws. These playwrights consciously write for and are produced by the “mainstream” theater. They have little to say about Lesbians.

The plays in this book are about Lesbians. They may deserve to be, but are not likely to be, produced by “mainstream” theater. Nor are they likely to be considered by heterosexually focused community theaters.

The playwrights knew this when they wrote them. These plays were written to be presented by those groups of daring theater-committed women, those groups that live in the small towns and in the cities throughout this country.

In my experience, the Lesbian playwright has a strong mental image of, attachment to, and affection for these groups; she probably emerged from one. It is imperative to honor and nurture that connection by paying the playwright for the struggle and product of her work.

The previous sentence gives focus to the important question of the value of women's work. That women deserve to be paid for their work, whether piloting a 747, or changing a diaper, or writing a play, seems obvious to me. The kind of work that is done is not the only item to be considered. More significant is the fact that *all* forms of work consume the *life's time of a woman*, and she deserves to be paid for any of them.

In certain radical circles, it is deemed enlightened and is certainly convenient to say, "Art should be free (so I won't pay for it)." Art should be free, but in that case so should food and housing. They aren't. Playwrights need food and housing, and they need to be paid for their art. Art *will* be free, *AFTER* food and housing are free to the artist. Please don't sacrifice the artist to ideals of the future that don't exist in the present.

Can anyone really convince themselves that marginal living—in order to have time to do one's art—is for the artist a glowing, romantic experience? Poverty diminishes the artist as readily as it does anyone else.

Another rationale for discarding the playwright: "We're putting on this production. We're taking all the risks. Actors and directors deserve to be paid, too. So we'll pay ourselves first, and if there's any money left over we'll pay the playwright what we can."

Sometimes "me, first" really does not apply.

It is important to consider the "way of creativity," how it happens in the theater. Our management of money needs to recognize and reflect this concern. The playwright is the source of theater. She is the creator-artist. Directors, actors, and technical crew are all interpretive artists. Their work is to interpret the script. They can't do their work unless the creative artist has completed hers first.

We of course are not talking about a play, collectively conceived and written by the actors and director. Ten to fifteen years ago when women's theater groups were first beginning to work, most groups did not have skilled playwrights and they could not find acceptable non-sexist scripts. So they had to develop their own material collectively. My hope is that this book will meet some of these groups' needs for material. I am addressing here issues which intersect these needs.

To Produce a Play

First get the playwright's permission (if nothing else, she wants to know her work is being performed); second, negotiate a royalty fee. In order to set a fair royalty fee, some playwrights need to know the number of seats in the performance space, the number of performances, the cost of admission, and whether any of the performances are benefits. Third, draw up your production budget, prioritize your expenses placing the playwright at the top, and then pay her with the first money available.

These playwrights write and this book is designed for you. Use both conscientiously. One of the main purposes of this book is to facilitate new productions of these plays. If anyone corrupts this purpose by ignoring the rights of the playwright, may the critics "pan" you, may the audience leave at intermission, and may the Muse turn away from you and close her eyes in disgust.

Be of good faith. *Honor the playwright!* In theater, she is the Muse's favorite.

— *The Editor*

Introduction

"The Doing of the Plays"

We begin out of the void, out of darkness and emptiness. . . . The void is the creatrix, the matrix. . . . We are not supposed to go down into the darkness of the core. Yet, if we can risk it, the something born of that nothing is the beginning of our truth.

— Adrienne Rich, in "Women and Honor"
from *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence*,
Selected Prose, 1966–1978.

This collection of plays by, for, and about Lesbians is the first of its kind published in this country. My mind still stutters at the reality of that sentence. So long, so bleak a void.

Soon after I sent out my call for scripts, a few friends—Lesbian and straight—made statements to me that this silence in theater's publishing world was based in "nothing to say, or no-one to say it." I guess that view meant the Lesbian experience leads to no critical or unusual insight; or if the Lesbian experience leads to insight, no Lesbian playwrights were skilled enough to write about it. Either of these explanations seemed even more indefensible and unrealistic than the silence. This book is a testament to a truer reality, our confrontation with an enforced void.

Now I must go back to the beginning. . . .

In March 1983, my home was in Santa Cruz County, California, a wonderful and extraordinary place in many ways: a luscious, kindly climate to live in; the Monterey Bay coastline to frolic at; five miles inland the Santa Cruz mountains with their forests of giant redwoods to walk through; a large, well-established, politically alert women's community to participate in; a remarkable gathering of women writers, many of them Lesbian, to listen to and marvel at.

Yet, unlike other communities of similar size and resources, we had no women's center, no women's bookshop, not even a women's bar where women were received as and treated as the primary clientele. We had no formal Lesbian network, no women's theater company, no Lesbian theater company, and no resident Lesbian playwrights.

Certainly there were a few women-focused projects happening: the

National Festival of Women's Theater;¹ *Matrix*, a women's magazine published monthly; the Santa Cruz Women's Health Collective; Wing-spread (another health clinic offering special attention to women's drug problems); and the Women's Crisis Support and Shelter Services. Each of these organizations was once someone's dream but my dreams were not happening for me in Santa Cruz.

Then, in March 1983, I began what I thought was a small quest. For a couple of years I had been casually looking for a Lesbian play to direct. It seemed everyone in town had seen *Dos Lesbos*, so there was no point in choosing that. In March, after directing a marvelously challenging and experimental script, *Tissue*, by Louise Page, a British feminist playwright, I started to search carefully for a Lesbian script. The next script I would direct had to be Lesbian. Not just feminist, not just womanist (though I embrace this concept and gasp at the breadth of Alice Walker's mind, and love her subtlety, her generosity, the cutting edge of her insights). The script had to be Lesbian.

"Lesbian" meant a viable, workable piece of theater written by a Lesbian; a script which consciously, and explicitly, claims through a Lesbian character a Lesbian perspective of the play's events. A Lesbian perspective, in this matter, meant: a life-stance marked by a strong, assured awareness of the suitability of the Lesbian connection between women, and an awareness of the societal tools used to oppose these connections.

I sent out the word through informal networks, but scripts did not appear at my doorstep. My next plan was to find a published anthology of Lesbian plays. *I really expected to find one*. Knowledgeable contacts regretfully assured me an anthology of Lesbian plays had never been published in this country.

The reality of this fact stunned and enraged me. The inconvenience of this void frustrated me. This silence compelled me to talk about it — no, let's be honest — I screamed, softly, to acquaintances, to friends, to theater cronies, to anyone handy. Some listened, and that was enough. Some listened and tried to console, and that was hopeless. But in June one listened in a very special way.

Beth Collins, a wonderful friend and former housemate, told her friend, Barb Wieser, that I wanted to direct a Lesbian play but couldn't find one. And did Barb realize there was no published anthology of Lesbian plays? Barb is an editor and partner in Aunt Lute Book Company, a publishing house committed to printing Lesbian works. She told Beth to tell me that if I would edit an anthology, Aunt Lute would be interested in considering it for publication.

When Beth relayed Barb's message to me, my mind immediately presented two vehement and quarreling voices: voice #1 screeched, "Don't be ridiculous. You can't do it. No one has ever done it. Don't try. It's too big for you." Meanwhile, voice #2 gleefully pealed, "Why, of course! What a great idea! Now, why didn't I think of that? It is a perfect project for your skills. You can do it." (Like many people, one thing I really need in order to try is one strong voice shouting encouragement.)

After the vocal storm quieted, I agreed to try the rather monumental task of editing this book.

It was at this point a new friend entered my life and this project. Sharon Jenkins, new to Santa Cruz from Boston, brought a lively mind, a generous heart, and a vivid understanding to me and to this book.

When I cautiously mentioned to her the idea of this anthology and my agreement to do it, she immediately expressed delight. (This response was important to me; she was one of the first people I told about this project.) Her spontaneous enthusiasm had an immediate and lasting impact; it spurred on my own enthusiasm and later as I encountered one difficulty or another, the memory of this conversation refreshed my determination to complete the project.

As the project progressed, our discussions repeatedly showed her uncanny grasp of the needs and potentialities of the book. Sharon's many suggestions for networking were always timely, strategic, and immeasurably helpful. For instance, the process of contacting playwrights one by one, in a hit or miss fashion, proved clumsy and insufficient. I mentioned to Sharon my desire to reach out nationally to more playwrights through women's media outlets, but I had no way of compiling a comprehensive mailing list. Sharon immediately gave me the address for the *Index/Directory of Women's Media*,² a wonderful networking tool. I ordered one and used it to contact women's newspapers, radio programs, and journals across the nation.

Sharon listened to me about plays, about book structure ideas, about ideas for the introduction and ethics statement, and always gave me encouragement and beneficial feedback.

If you ever find a project like this (something that at first thought seems overwhelming), go ahead and do it, but try to be sure you have a friend like Sharon Jenkins handy to help you. Not to worry, though, if at the start a "Sharon" isn't at hand. Trust the project to bring one to you, and probably it will.

This task of writing an introduction is the most awkward and un-

pleasant for me. The job brings me head-to-head with twenty years of not writing about theater, and it also focuses my suspicions, my distrust, my annoyance — oh, let's face it — my total impatience with the people who do write about theater. This includes: all critics of American theater except two; all theater academicians whom I have encountered but one; and all people who insist on reading plays exclusively as literature, and, measuring them accordingly. Experience has taught me that *many* plays that read well do not play well, and conversely, *many* plays that play well do not read well. The values of theater are not the same as the values of literature. Sometimes a play satisfies both sets of values, but not always. The plays in this book were chosen with an eye to both concerns, but theater is the priority here.

My training, experience, skill, emotional and mental stance, are as a director of theater, not as a theorist or writer. It is the practice of theater — the doing of the plays, the staging of a script — which intrigues me. To present a script which has a visceral impact, entertains, and, hopefully, challenges an audience is for me the most thrilling use of my time.

The plays in this book were chosen because they reflect that practical bias *and* because I like them. (Each of them has been read by at least one other person, who also liked it.) They are the best of the more than 50 we could choose from. This collection does not claim to be a representative survey of Lesbian theater forms. These plays were chosen as being among the most skillful and workable.

Nothing would please me more than to go through the whole process of directing each play, which, at this writing, I have not had the chance to do. The process I trust and feel comfortable with goes like this: the first reading of a play tells me mainly if I like it. The second reading tells me if I like it well enough to direct it. If I do, and money, time, and space are available, then a production is scheduled, auditions held, cast and crew assembled, and rehearsals scheduled (a minimum of six to eight weeks).

After 15 years of directing I still read a play (of any length) 30 to 40 times before rehearsals begin. These readings are only prologue to the main body of my work. The main body of analysis occurs in tandem with the actors during rehearsals. When the rehearsal process begins (with "no admittance" signs posted on doors to insure uninterrupted concentration and security), I have in mind some of my "director's answers" and about one-third of all I need to understand about the play in order to guide the actors toward an acceptable level of performance skills. The other two-thirds of the understanding comes during the

rehearsals with the actors. A series of questions and answers about the script begins. As we progress, the questions and answers become ever more specific. Questions and answers derive: 1. from the script, 2. from the actors, 3. from me, and most importantly, if all is going well, from a kaleidoscopic combination of all three. A combination so constant and contiguous, by opening night it isn't possible to trace a question or answer to its first source.

Among some theater workers, including me, this process is known as ensemble work. This level of work requires lots of reciprocal trust and lots of time; I like to have one hour of rehearsal time for every one minute of performance time. This is not always possible but it is my preference, and the mentioning of it underscores the importance of using rehearsal time conscientiously.

It is my observation that this group process of analysis cannot be duplicated, solo, by a writer, no matter how pure the intent nor how brilliant the mind. Little wonder I don't want to try. I have expressed these feelings to my publishers, and they graciously agreed not to require lengthy written analyses of me. I have agreed, however, to write a SHORT statement about each play, to explain what it is about each of these plays that appealed to me. These short statements, called "Editor's Notes," appear on a page preceding each play.

Now I must address a difficult topic: Readers will surely notice a major void that I had hoped to fill in this first volume. One of my hopes was to include Women of Color Lesbian voices, explicitly stating their triple-hazarded existence, as women, dark-skinned, and Lesbians. But those scripts were not submitted.

It is no surprise that the racist structure of our society carries over to white Lesbians. My inability to find plays by Women of Color says more about the lack of Women of Color in my own community and my lack of communication with Women of Color from other communities than whether the plays exist.

Though my mailing lists included media outlets to women of color, though I made initial contacts with writers and publishing houses to search for these plays, the fact remains my search was not enough. My hope is that knowledge of this search, albeit inadequate, will encourage the Women of Color Lesbian playwrights to send their plays to me via my publisher. Please pass the word.

This volume is completed. It is not all that can be done, however, and my hope is that a second volume will happen. For the second volume, I would like to see a mythic, fantastical play. I would like a play which experiments with non-linear time and place, non-linear plot and

character development. Something wildly experimental. Also, I'm looking for a truly vitriolic script: one that explodes with the outrage we occasionally feel at the smug assumptions of the "compulsory heterosexuality" of society. Note: I do not require nor do I prefer all of the above in one script. And, yes, I am interested in scripts that use conventional structure.

It would not surprise me if the ideas and feelings expressed in this introduction are stated more clearly and forcefully in other places and by other women who are more skillful and more experienced writers. I have encountered some of these writers in my reading. It is not possible to name all of the writers who have been important to me; they are so many now. But I want to mention a few: Bettina Aptheker, Judith Arcana, Ellen Bass, Terry Baum, Ann Bennett, Phyllis Chesler, Sarah Dreher, Susan Glaspell, Audre Lorde, Judy Mayhen, Maude Meehan, Marge Piercy, Tillie Olsen, Adrienne Rich, May Sarton, Ray Gwyn Smith, Alice Walker, Claire Braz-Valentine, and Kay Weaver.

Some of these women are famous and some are not. Some of these women are Lesbian and some are not. But their words came to me at various critical moments, and turned me to a new path I needed in order to continue. Their words are rooted in my mind, in my life, and I am changed, and I am happier for those changes. I want to thank all the women who write, especially the playwrights. I want to thank all the women whose words I've read, or who have read their words to me. You writers may not know, so I want to say, *I REMEMBER YOU*.

Finally, my dream is that many will find and produce the plays in this book.

. . . that audience members will see these plays and their lives will be improved.

. . . that the playwrights will flourish.

. . . that Lesbians will dream new plays and new books of plays; and that they will be as fortunate in their dreams as I have been in mine.

—Kate McDermott
Santa Cruz, January 1985

1. The first NFWT happened in Santa Cruz in May, 1983; the second in October, 1984. It is planned now as an annual event. I want to encourage women's theater companies and Lesbian theater companies to participate. Here is the address if you want more information: The National Festival of Women's Theater, P.O. Box 1222, Santa Cruz, California 95061.

2. Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press, 3306 Ross Place, N.W., Washington DC 20008. Dr. Donna Allen, Director.

DOS LESBOS

A Play By, For, and About Perverts

by
Terry Baum
and
Carolyn Myers

Production History

Dos LESBOS opened at Ollie's Bar in Oakland, California on February 27, 1981 with Alice Marie Thompson II and Terry Baum starring as Peg and Gracie, respectively. Carolyn Myers directed and Judy Gottlieb was the musical director, with Nina Ruymaker as arranger. The band was composed of Nina Ruymaker on piano, Donna Viscuso on flute, and Ann Pope on drums. The set was designed by John Wullbrandt.

Dos LESBOS ran for two years in the San Francisco Bay Area and in Santa Cruz. It was nominated for the Bay Area Theater Critics' Playwrights Award and the Cable Car Theater Award. Dos LESBOS has since been produced in Portland, Oregon and Austin, Texas.

All inquiries concerning *all* rights to this play should be addressed to Terry Baum, 545 Douglass St., San Francisco, California 94114.

Authors' Notes

Dos LESBOS can be, and has been, performed in a wide variety of settings and styles. In the original production the stage resembled a realistic one-room apartment, with a bed, a huge and bizarrely colored armchair, a desk and typewriter, and even a kitchen unit. However, when the play toured outside the Bay Area, we made do with a table,

a chair, and a stool. The acting style also ranged from a kind of intimate realism to a very broad and brash presentationalism.

We want to mention that we consider it imperative for *Dos LESBOS* to be directed by a woman.

This version of the script was the final version *at the time the anthology was published*. But this play is continually rewritten and improved. For the final version for production, the playwright should be contacted.

Editor's Notes

In March 1982, *Dos LESBOS* ran for several weeks in Santa Cruz. The first performance I saw was early in this run—I recall my surprise and delight at the rollicking humor and candid fury of the script—laughter rolled out of me. I remember aching ribs, no time to breathe, and tears pouring down my cheeks. I went back four more times and took every available friend with me. They howled approval too.

Long ago it became apparent to me the arts and sciences seem to share a phenomenon. What happens in one place is often happening simultaneously in various forms in many other places. A scientist who achieves a “breakthrough” in her field often breaks through just ahead of several colleagues who were separately, independently, approaching the same breakthrough. This process happens in theater, also. On seeing *Dos LESBOS*, I felt certain that other lesbian playwrights in many parts of this country were also writing effective theater. When this anthology was suggested, my memory curled back to this *Dos LESBOS* “experience” and provided me one more affirmation to help this anthology begin.

After reading *Dos LESBOS*, it was clear I wanted it for the anthology.

Dos LESBOS utilizes many theater and entertainment forms: vaudeville, musical comedy, parody, dramatic realism, melodrama, comedy; it also manages to deliver “homophobia” a charming and most effective jab in the ribs. All in all, *Dos LESBOS* seems to me to be an amalgam—a sort of revue/play—a series of scenes (each of which could stand alone) tied together by the two characters and a slice-of-life continuity.

Working this play should be a delight and a challenge. The thought of it makes me smile.

Credits

Written by Terry Baum

"Coming Out Transformations," by Carolyn Myers

Creative Consultants: Judy Gottlieb and Alice Marie Thompson II

Songs:

"I Don't Care" by Jean Lenox and Harry Sutton

"Jill the Ripper," music by John Keating, lyrics by David Hyman

"The Twelve Days," lyrics by Terry Baum, Judy Gottlieb, David Hyman, Carolyn Myers, and Alice Marie Thompson II

"Misery Loves Company," music and lyrics by David Hyman

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DOS LESBOS

I Don't Care

(Peg and Gracie enter and sing together)

They say I'm crazy, got no sense, but I DONT CARE.
They may or may not take offense, but I DONT CARE.
You see, I'm kind of independent, of a clever race descendent
That's why I DONT CARE.

I DONT CARE, I DONT CARE,
What people think of me.
I'm happy-go-lucky
They say I am plucky
So jolly and carefree
I DONT CARE, I DONT CARE,
If I do get the mean and stoney stare.
If I'm never successful, it won't be distressful
'Cause I DONT CARE!

(Blackout)

The Job

(Peg is discovered reading the newspaper. Gracie enters, kisses Peg)

GRACIE Hi hon. How'd it go today?

PEG I can't understand it. I did everything Ronald Reagan told me to do. I answered every single want ad in the paper, and I'm still unemployed. Maybe I should take up typing.

GRACIE Please don't *speak* to me about typing.

PEG How was *your* day?

GRACIE Don't ask. I don't want to talk about work. I don't want to think about work. Every day I have to go out on the streets and sell my fingers to the highest bidder. So just don't ask me about work.

PEG All right, I won't ask.

GRACIE I had a very traumatic experience at the office today. I was a coward. The coward of Abromowitz, Rizzo and Chan, attorneys at law . . . esquire. It was disgusting. Why didn't I say something? Why didn't I *do* something? (Peg shrugs her shoulders) It just so happens I've written a poem about it.

PEG Great.

GRACIE Would you like to hear it?

PEG Sure. (She gets a beer and settles down to listen. Gracie rummages in her purse until she finds the poem)

GRACIE (Reading) In the Staff Room Before Work. (Pause) No, In the Staff Room Before Work *Begins!* (She writes down the new word)

PEG That's much better.

GRACIE Yes, I think so. (Begins reading again) In the Staff Room Before Work Begins. (Melodramatically)

Precious moments of talk before chaining ourselves to the typewriter.
Stolen moments of freedom before the slavery begins.

We are all one, all one.

All women, all women

All groveling, all groveling

To survive.

But *that* happens at eight A.M.

Now it is 7:45 A.M. and we are HAPPY!

We suckle the coffee urn.

Mother Caffeine gives us our daily zap.

Some call it gossip, these countless slender umbilical cords through
which we make connection.

I am connected.

I float in the placenta of sisterhood under fluorescent lights.

"I went to wildest party last night," says Nancy Nice . . .

PEG (Interrupting) Nancy Nice?

GRACIE There's Nancy Kaufman, Nancy Minor, and Nancy Nice.

PEG I think I'd kill myself if my last name was Nice.

GRACIE (Gives up on poem and decides to tell story) Anyhow, so Nancy Nice goes to this wild party, right? And she sees some dirty movies there, right? "It was awful," she says. "But," she says, "at least it was a man and a woman, if you know what I mean." Everybody *laughed*. And then she said it again, just in case they all hadn't heard it the first time. "At least it was a man and a woman, *if you know what I mean.*" I was furious. I wanted to say something. I wanted to do something. I thought of fifty things to say. I almost said one of them. But they would have thought I was a jerk — partly because I was a lesbian, but mainly because I got upset when they were having a good time. So I said nothing. (Sarcastically) "At least it was a man and a woman."

PEG If you know what I mean.

GRACIE If you know what I mean.

PEG (Comforting Gracie) They're idiots. You know that. You shouldn't let them get to you.

GRACIE I just didn't want to be a pill and ruin a good time. I just wanted to be one of the gang.

PEG Don't be so hard on yourself. It takes a while to figure out what to do in situations like that.

GRACIE By the time I've figured it out, the situation is all over. Nancy Nice insulted me, and she doesn't even know it. Why didn't I say something?

PEG You know what you need?

GRACIE What?

PEG You need the Charlene Atlas Course in Word-Lifting.

GRACIE Word-Lifting?

PEG That's right. Through a series of gradual exercises, you train yourself to talk back, to lift those heavy, heavy words that have a tendency to get stuck at the back of your throat when you're offended.

GRACIE Mine seem to stay down somewhere in my diaphragm.

PEG In your diaphragm? That's serious.

GRACIE Oh no!

PEG But, not to worry! Charlene Atlas will teach you to bench press those insults, lifting them from deep down in your diaphragm, up to your esophagus, past your vocal chords . . . and actually say them to someone!

GRACIE No kidding!

PEG Are you tired of having insults kicked in your face at the office?

GRACIE You bet.

PEG Are you sick of having innuendos hurled at your head in the street?

GRACIE You'd better believe it, sister.

PEG Are you fed up with ignorant assholes trampling on your tenderest feelings?

GRACIE I sure am.

PEG Then Charlene Atlas has the answer for you! Her guaranteed, foolproof course in Word-Lifting!

GRACIE When do I start?

PEG Right now. First, close your eyes and say to yourself: I am a lesbian.

GRACIE (After closing her eyes) Okay. I did that.

PEG Now, say it out loud, not to anyone in particular.

GRACIE I am a lesbian.

PEG Now, look at me when you say it.

GRACIE (Does so) I am a lesbian.

PEG Now . . . imagine that I'm Nancy Nice. (Taunting) At least it was a man and a woman. At least it was a man and a woman.

GRACIE Listen, you have to say, "If you know what I mean." That was the worst part.

PEG Right, I forgot. (Bears down on Gracie, who backs away) At least it was a man and a woman, if you know what I mean. At least it was a man and a woman, if you know what I mean. If you know what I mean, if you know what I mean . . .

GRACIE (Disconcerted and mumbling) Nancy Nice, I'm a . . .

PEG (Driving her into a corner) A man and a woman, a man and a woman, if you know what I mean, if you know what I mean!

GRACIE (Pulls herself together and turns the tables) Nancy Nice, what's wrong with a Woman and a Woman? Do you think it's disgusting, perverted? Do you think that we're all too nice here in this staff room to have ever done IT with a woman? You're wrong, Nancy Nice. You may be nice, but I'm not nice at all. (Caresses "Nancy Nice" while she moans in horror) I'm a bad girl, a nasty girl. I do it with a woman all the time. Nancy Nice, I AM A LESBIAN! ("Nancy Nice" collapses) And I don't like *you* making fun of it, if you know what I mean.

PEG (leaping up) Congratulations. Here's your certificate of graduation.

GRACIE I am a lesbian!

PEG You are now qualified to bring up a host of unpleasant subjects in daily conversation, such as your own homosexuality . . .

GRACIE (Striking a pose) I am a lesbian.

PEG . . . Starving children in various parts of the world . . .

GRACIE (Another attitude now) I am a lesbian!

PEG And various other topics that people would really rather not even think about.

GRACIE (Climbs on a chair to tell the world) My fellow Americans, I am a . . .
LESBIAN!

(Blackout)

Coming Out to the Parents

(The scene opens with Peg cleaning up the kitchen and Gracie lounging in an armchair, deep in thought)

GRACIE Maybe I should write my parents and tell them that I'm a lesbian.

PEG That's a good idea.

GRACIE Maybe I *shouldn't* write my parents and tell them that I'm a lesbian.

PEG That's a better idea.

GRACIE What do you think I should do?

PEG I think it's up to you.

GRACIE What did your parents do when you came out to them?

PEG My mother cried and my father said I was dragging the family name through the mud. That was so hysterical. After all the crap that's gone on in my family, *I'm* the one to bring shame on them. Oh yeah, and they disowned me.

GRACIE That's very impressive.

PEG It was kind of scary at the time.

GRACIE What exactly does one have to do to disown one's daughter?

PEG You say "I disown thee" three times and change your will. That way, if your parents die while you're disowned, you're up shit creek. No inheritance.

GRACIE And all because you're queer.

PEG They really make it very hard to be a lesbian, parents do.

GRACIE How long were you disowned?

PEG Two years. I didn't speak to them once. It was great. You can't imagine how relaxing it is to be disowned. I didn't have to phone, didn't have to write, didn't have to go home for Thanksgiving or Christmas. I really enjoyed being disowned.

GRACIE Why did they repossess you?

PEG They missed me.

GRACIE They missed you, huh? So how long do you think it will take *my* parents to get over *my* coming out to them?

PEG For you, a minimum of four years.

GRACIE Four years! Come on, they're liberal Jews. They've got to be able to do it faster than that.

PEG Oh no. No, no, no. Liberal Jews can be the *worst*. You're supposed to be better than everyone else because you're Jewish. Not *worse* than everyone else.

GRACIE So what else did your parents say when you came out to them?

PEG I remember my father using the word "slimy" many more times than was absolutely necessary. And my mother said that her stomach hurt and she hoped she didn't get a bleeding ulcer from the whole ordeal. And my younger brother informed me that he'd like to smash my face in.

GRACIE Wow!

PEG Well, my younger brother's very melodramatic. Besides, he's been wanting to smash my face in since he was five years old. The fact that I'm a lesbian just gave him a good excuse.

GRACIE It sounds like fun.

PEG It most definitely is not fun, although maybe *you'd* enjoy it. It'd give you something to write about.

GRACIE I could never tell them in person, though, like you did.

PEG Of course not. You'd want a written document to show what you'd been through.

GRACIE I want to do it.

PEG Why now?

GRACIE Our relationship is pretty serious, right?

PEG Right.

GRACIE And we're going to spend the rest of our lives together, right?

PEG Right.

GRACIE So my parents will have to find out sometime, right?

PEG Not necessarily . . .

GRACIE So it might as well be right now, right? Right!

PEG Okay, but get ready for the fireworks.

GRACIE (Sitting down at the typewriter) Now, how does this sound? Dear M and D . . .

PEG M and D? It sounds like a tampon.

GRACIE I really call them Mommy and Daddy. But I'm too old to say Mommy and Daddy anymore. So to get around it, I say M and D.

PEG Get back to the letter.

GRACIE Dear M and D, I have some good news and some bad news. (Types) The good news is . . . I have finally found the person I want to spend the rest of my life with (Types) The bad news is . . . (Pause) she's not Jewish! (Types) You see, I'm trying to disarm them with humor.

PEG Now that they're rolling around on the floor in hysterics, what do you say next?

GRACIE I don't know. On second thought, maybe a joke is the wrong approach. How about something simple but eloquent like . . . Dear M and D, I am a lesbian, period. (Types)

PEG And then?

GRACIE Isn't that enough? That's the relevant information. What do you say after you say you're queer? I'm so sick of figuring out how much to say and when to say it. I'm fed up with always thinking about when I can touch you and how much. I just wish that everyone in the entire world knew that I was a lesbian right now. Then I wouldn't have to come out anymore.

PEG It's pretty tedious, this coming out business.

GRACIE (Types) Dear M and D . . . (Pulls paper out of the typewriter and rips it up)

PEG Why don't you tell M and D to their faces?

GRACIE I don't want to see their expressions.

PEG How about sending them a polaroid picture of you and me kissing? That ought to do it.

GRACIE No, you're not very photogenic.

PEG Skywriting? An anonymous phone call?? (Pretends to talk on the phone with a foreign accent) Hello? M and D? Your daughter is a lesbian! Heh heh heh.

GRACIE You're not taking this seriously. This is a serious problem and I don't know what to do about it.

PEG You know what I always say?

GRACIE What?

PEG If you don't know what to do, then just leave the problem alone. It'll go away . . . like a pimple.

GRACIE This situation is not a pimple. It's a blackhead. It needs to be squeezed. But I can't figure out how to do it.

PEG Why don't you talk it over with your therapist?

GRACIE She'd charge me thirty dollars to act like my mother.

PEG Thirty dollars?

GRACIE Yep.

PEG Hell, I'll do it for nothing. I can play your mother. I'll just do and say all the most terrible and disgusting things I can imagine doing and saying.
(Puts on an apron to play the "mother")

GRACIE (Takes apron away from Peg, puts it on) No fair. It's my problem and she's my mother. I get to play her. You have to be me.

PEG Okay. I'm going out there and come back as you and announce to you, that's your mother, that I, that's you, am a lesbian . . . are a lesbian . . . whatever.

GRACIE Got it. (Gracie washes dishes. Peg goes out of the room and knocks) Door's open.

PEG (Entering) Hi Mom.

GRACIE Hello, dear. (A motherly kiss) How was your day?

PEG Fine. I'm a lesbian. (Gracie drops bowl she was washing back in the water) Well, say something.

GRACIE I can't think of anything to say.

PEG This is hopeless.

GRACIE I don't like the way you played me. I would never just stomp in and say, "Hi Mom, I'm a lesbian." How tacky.

PEG I was giving you a chance to role play.

GRACIE I can't believe you would portray me as so totally lacking in finesse.

PEG Look, let's start over.

GRACIE I imagine the scene as being dramatic and intense.

PEG How about . . . Greek Tragedy!

(The lighting changes to a low and melodramatic red, cymbals crash and drums roll. Peg and Gracie assume an erect bearing and, in the scene, use the simple, sweeping gestures of the Greek Tragic style. In the following scenes, as soon as the actresses announce a new style, they immediately take on the vocal quality and posture of that style. Peg always plays the daughter, and Gracie the mother.)*

* An alternative transition to these scenes is included at the end of the script, to allow Gracie to play the daughter, and Peg the mother.

DAUGHTER Mother, I must tell you of the love I bear for women, of the world I have found on the Isle of Lesbos. If only you could see the women there — how brave they are, how strong, how modest. Astonishing!

MOTHER I have heard they are drunk, hopelessly drunk on sexual desire. It revolts me to imagine them nestling like birds in thick leaves, locked in their lust.

DAUGHTER You do not know how to listen.

MOTHER I should have let your father guard you with bronze shields, kept you from going abroad, disgracing your family.

DAUGHTER Bronze shields do not hold off women's hands.

MOTHER The last time I saw you was the day you set sail with your brothers. Some inhuman power took my senses then to let you go, and decided your fate for you. And now I look at you and find that I have no daughter.

DAUGHTER Mother, you need only choose between some false image you hold of a daughter of perfection, and me, your real, your living child.

MOTHER No! Do not touch me. You cannot pretend to be the daughter I have lost. My daughter lies dead . . .

DAUGHTER Your sword edges near the heart. It stabs deep, bittersharp.

MOTHER Get thee gone.

DAUGHTER I will set my sail again. There is no place for me here. In my city, in my house, in my mother's arms, all despise me here. Will you give me your farewell?

MOTHER Shall I say, "terrible, but blest"? No mere mother can bless what the gods revile. When the gods despise someone, she goes outcast, forgotten. So go you from me.

(Daughter walks away slowly, heartbroken. Cymbals crash and lights return to normal. As do Peg and Gracie)

GRACIE Bleagh!

PEG Too heavy, too heavy.

GRACIE I want something that reflects the absurdity of human relations. Some scene that's comic . . .

PEG . . . and fastmoving . . .

GRACIE . . . and witty . . .

PEG . . . and lascivious

TOGETHER Restoration Comedy!

(The band plays baroque music, as Peg and Gracie pirouette around the stage, arranging the furniture to include the following scene)

MOTHER Dearest daughter, at Mrs. Williperk's salon today, your name was mentioned gently and with praise by . . . Margaret Thatchery.

DAUGHTER (Aside) Margaret Thatchery! At the very name I swoon.

MOTHER And I wondered how you two happed to meet.

DAUGHTER (Aside) She attempts to ferret me out. I must dissemble to protect my Margaret. (To Mother) Margaret Thatcher? Do I remember her?

MOTHER No, no, no! Margaret Thatchery, the parson's wife.

DAUGHTER Nay! Do not define her so! Not as someone's wife! (Gets a grip on herself) Describe the lady's more personal qualities.

MOTHER She has a tongue of power . . . for *poetry*, can read Latin and French . . .

DAUGHTER (Aside) Oh, the languages that tongue can speak!

MOTHER She is well expressed. And when she speaks her ivory bosom heaves with all the passions of a . . . good mother, a wife, a neighbor.

DAUGHTER (Aside) And a lover.

MOTHER Her fingers dance the dance of needles and of fire . . . over her lace-work and embroidery.

DAUGHTER (Has pulled out a handkerchief, actually Peg's bandana, and is smelling it rapturously) I'faith, Mother, say no more. I *know* the lady, and I love her.

MOTHER As a friend, love?

DAUGHTER (Aside) I will be brave. (To Mother) Nay, more than that.

MOTHER As a mother, child?

DAUGHTER No, no, no! As a lover, mother. As a wife. Yea, as a mistress.

MOTHER No!

DAUGHTER She has embroidered me this handkerchief as a token of her love.

MOTHER (Grabbing handkerchief) Let me see that. Oh! I faint! I die!!
(Collapses on floor)

DAUGHTER (Retrieving handkerchief her mother has dropped) Oh, I have shocked you, Mother. But rest here and list a moment, I beg you. Ours is a true love, Mother. As true as that of yours and Father's.

MOTHER (Aside) Truer than that, I hope.

DAUGHTER And though this love cannot be bandied about at garden parties or gossiped of at court, is't less for that?

MOTHER (Groan)

DAUGHTER Mother, dear Mother, please consider what a good woman is Margaret, what an honorable woman.

MOTHER (Groan!!)

DAUGHTER And when you spoke of her tongue . . .

MOTHER (Grooaann!)

DAUGHTER . . . Her ivory bosom . . .

MOTHER (Groooooaannnn!!!!)

DAUGHTER . . . Her finger's work . . .

MOTHER (Rising from her prostrate position) Daughter, stop. I can bear no more. This woman is a traitor, a harpie, a vixen.

DAUGHTER You speak from shallow prejudice.

MOTHER (Grabbing handkerchief) Even this handkerchief is counterfeit.

DAUGHTER Now you go too far!!! (Dives for handkerchief, and misses)

MOTHER Margaret Thatchery did not design this handkerchief. It was given t'her by another.

DAUGHTER (Successfully retrieves handkerchief) Mother, I call you out. Lookee here. From M.T. to M.T. That is, from Margaret Thatchery to Millicent Teaselwop.

MOTHER Or to Margaret Thatchery from *Maria* Teaselwop.

DAUGHTER What!????? Maria Teaselwop!!!!???

MOTHER (Bowing) The same. I embroidered this for Margeret Thatchery.

DAUGHTER Me thought this dainty smelled familiar.

MOTHER Yes, my daughter. I too have fallen under the spell of deceitful Margaret Thatchery.

DAUGHTER But Mother! You are married!

MOTHER So is Margaret Thatchery.

DAUGHTER But you are married to Father!

MOTHER Daughter, you have much to learn of the conjugal bed. Why, your father doesn't know his . . .

DAUGHTER Mother, I pray you, stop!

MOTHER Very well, suffice it to say that your father prefers his billiards, his young women, and, on occasion, young men's rumps . . .

DAUGHTER Mother, this is nothing my ears wish to hear from your lips . . . Ohhhhh, my heart is breaking!

MOTHER I never knew you were so fond of father.

DAUGHTER Over Margaret Thatchery!

MOTHER Oh, I'd forgotten about her. Your first love . . .

DAUGHTER (Stomping on handkerchief) And my last! Pernicious womanhood!

MOTHER (Picking up handkerchief, folding it neatly, tucking it away) Oh, nonsense. There are plenty of ladies of fashion who prefer the gentler sex. Now I know nought of your younger set, but among my friends . . . Mrs. Williperk . . .

DAUGHTER You and Mrs. Williperk?

MOTHER Mrs. Ashford.

DAUGHTER You and Mrs. Ashford?

MOTHER And especially Miss Nusbern. You remember her.

DAUGHTER My mother and my harpsichord teacher?!?!

MOTHER I remember well those sweet, golden drawing room afternoons,
while you practiced your instrument in the locked room next door . . .

(Mother and Daughter freeze. The band breaks into a merry minuet to end the scene)

PEG Now let's do something more modern . . .

GRACIE . . . more psychological . . .

PEG . . . more philosophical . . .

GRACIE . . . and more gloomy . . .

PEG An Ingmar Bergman movie!

(The lighting becomes stark. The band members create the sounds of the wind, a clock ticking, a duck quacking)

DAUGHTER (Staring blankly into the void) Mother . . . (Long pause) I am a lesbian . . . (Long pause) I do it with women.

MOTHER (Another long pause) You . . . do it . . . with . . . women?

DAUGHTER I do it with women. (Far-off sounds of wind, clock, and duck)

MOTHER And so . . . this is what I have to live with for my future . . . You? I feel like . . .

DAUGHTER (Fondling Mother lasciviously) I *feel* like . . .

MOTHER (Feebly protesting) Daughter, no . . . too much . . . I refuse . . . I'm against incest.

DAUGHTER I do it with women!

(Quacking, ticking, wind howling, and ethereal screams from the band)

PEG Are you ready for a dose of modern American reality?

GRACIE Not yet.

PEG How about a little modern American unreality?

GRACIE T.V.! A T.V. situation comedy.

(Band plays the theme from some familiar sitcom. Gracie and Peg again assume their mother-daughter roles. Mother is washing the dishes, in mime, as daughter skips in with a big ribbon in her hair)

DAUGHTER Hi, Mom!

MOTHER Hello, sweetie pie! (Gives Daughter a maternal kiss) You know, the phone has been ringing off the hook all afternoon!

DAUGHTER (Excited) Did Jeannie call?

MOTHER Three different boys!!

DAUGHTER (Disappointed) Oh. (She finds a bag of potato chips to munch from)

MOTHER Huey and Donald and Louie. And if you ask me, I think they were all calling to ask you to the dance. At least, I know Donald was, because his mother told me . . .

(Daughter tries to say something through a mouthful of potato chips)

MOTHER Honeybun, you know I don't like you to talk with your mouth full.

DAUGHTER (Finally able to articulate) Mom, I heard some new words today, and I don't know what they mean.

MOTHER What are the words, darling?

DAUGHTER "Dyke" and "lesbian."

MOTHER Well now. A dyke is a big wall of earth to hold back the water. And a l—, a l— (She cannot bring herself to say "lesbian") And the other one is a sick, unhappy woman whose father probably beat her and whose mother was a prostitute or worked full-time and didn't pay attention to protecting her little girl!

DAUGHTER And that's all a lesbian is?

MOTHER You don't need to worry, princess. No l— . . . no l— (Still can't say it) no "one of those" ever came from a family like ours.

DAUGHTER Oh.

MOTHER Anyhow, I want to tell you all about your exciting phone calls. Donald's mother said . . .

DAUGHTER I hate Donald! He's a cootie, he's a jerk, he's a doo doo head. Why can't he be more like his sister? Jeannie's so nice, she's so funny and pretty and smart and she has such nice hair and she's such a good speller . . .

MOTHER (Washing the dishes while the daughter dries) Well, dear, you know what they always say: "Boys will be boys!" And then, when they grow up, men will be men. There's just nothing you can do about it.

DAUGHTER I never understood that.

MOTHER But they're wonderful, because without men, we wouldn't have little babies!

DAUGHTER Mom, would you be mad at me if I never had any little babies?

MOTHER Oh, you just can't help it, sweetie pie. Once you get married, it just . . . sort of happens!

DAUGHTER What if I don't get married?

MOTHER Oh now, that's silly! Somebody will like you.

DAUGHTER But somebody likes me now!

MOTHER Oh!

DAUGHTER Jeannie likes me.

MOTHER Oh.

DAUGHTER And I like Jeannie too. And we want to live together for ever and ever.

MOTHER You had *three* phone calls today from three different boys. I'd say you're an "It" girl!

DAUGHTER A what?

MOTHER An "It" girl. When I was young, that's what we called the girls who were popular with the boys. We called them "It" girls, because they had "It." Get it?

DAUGHTER Can't I be an "It" girl with the other girls?

MOTHER No, dear, don't be silly. You can be an "It" girl for Donnie, and that's *IT*. I invited Donnie over for dinner tonight.

DAUGHTER But I told you, I hate Donald!

MOTHER I'm going to barbecue some hamburgers. And I made a macaroni salad . . .

DAUGHTER But Mom! Jeannie's coming over to spend the night tonight. We've been planning this all week. I *told* you.

(Silence)

MOTHER Jeannie's gone to visit her grandma.

DAUGHTER What??!!

MOTHER For the whole summer. Jeannie's mom and I got together last night and we decided that Jeannie needed to go to the country . . . right away.

(Daughter's chin begins to quiver. She bows her head, crying)

MOTHER Oh, baby doll, I know that you're upset now. But later on in your life, you'll thank us for worrying about you and loving you so much. And maybe, someday, after you and Jeannie are all grown up and have babies of your own, you'll get together and look back on this time and just laugh and laugh! Ooops! There's the doorbell. That must be Donnie! (*Rushes off to answer door*)

(More sit-com music)

PEG So far we've failed to capture the depth of revulsion your mother will feel.

GRACIE . . . The disgust, the terror . . .

PEG . . . The sense of overwhelming panic . . .

GRACIE . . . the feeling that the world is coming to an end . . .

PEG A horror movie!

(Low, thrilling horror music from the band. Thunder)

DAUGHTER (Very ladylike) Mother, I intend to spend the evening in my study, quietly reading and writing. Pray, do not disturb me.

MOTHER As you wish, daughter. (Exits)

DAUGHTER (Sits down to write) My dearest darling Hubert, my great love for you fills me, as I sit here while the beautiful full moon pours its beams on me . . . (Begins to pant and heave, as if some power were taking over her body. Regains control of herself and returns to the letter) Dear Hubert, the moon beats down on me mercilessly. I like you . . . every once in a while. (Begins to transform again into a bulldyke. Tears up letter. Walks around room, laughing sinisterly, feeling her strength)

MOTHER (Enters) Daughter, would you like some cocoa? (She stops and stares in horror at her daughter, who is now a full-fledged bulldyke)

DAUGHTER (Turns and looks at her mother, laughs triumphantly and insanely. Mother cowers in fright at the monster her daughter has become. Daughter returns to her letter writing) Dear Hubert, you disgust me. (Laughs wildly. Begins another letter) My dearest Elizabeth, as I sit here in the moonlight, I think of your beautiful breasts and I want to . . . (Howls like a wolf, as Mother sobs brokenhearted)

(Blackout)

Men

GRACIE Dear M and D . . . (Peg enters) Hey listen to this. I think I've finally figured it out . . . What's the matter?

PEG I just got off the bus, see? Not in a very good fucking mood from looking for work all day. This creep starts following me down the street. "Hey baby, let's have some fun. You look like you need a real man to fuck you." You know, all the traditional pleasantries. I didn't say anything. Just kept walking. He keeps following me. "Come on, baby, suck my cock. Oh yeah, you know you want to. You know you do." Finally, I turn around and say, "Listen man, I'm a lesbian. I'm not interested in men. So just leave me alone. Okay?" *And he spit on me!* I started screaming. I don't know what I said . . . "YOU BASTARD!" . . . YOU STUPID!" *I wanted to kill him!* He took off down the street. I scared the *shit* out of him! *I wanted to kill him* (Pause) Those miserable little wienie brains! Why can't they leave us alone? Isn't it enough for them that most of the women in the world are straight? No, it just drives them crazy that we don't want to be fucked. Find a hole and stick it in . That's all they think about. They don't care if it's a woman, a man, a chicken or a cantaloupe.

GRACIE Gay men aren't so bad. At least they do it to each other instead of doing it to women.

PEG Let them act out all their bizarre fantasies with other men. I don't care.

GRACIE Honey, what can I do to make you feel better? Fix you a drink? Give you a massage? How about some potato chips?

PEG Just give me a massage. Oh, and when you have some free time, you might kill all the men in the world. That would definitely make me feel better.

GRACIE (Massaging Peg's back and neck) Actually, that's a very interesting idea. We could have an international plot to kill all the men! After all, what do Genghis Khan, Stalin, Hitler, and Idi Amin all have in common? Are they all white? No. Are they all capitalists? No. Are they all heterosexual? Probably, although there's a little doubt about Hitler. But what do these people indisputably have in common, besides the fact that they screwed up the world? They're all *men*! Now, if all the women kill all the men . . .

PEG Then we would be a world of murderers.

GRACIE A world of female murderers. *Murderesses*. I'd rather live in that world than the one we're living in right now.

PEG What about the faggots? Would you kill them?

GRACIE I would miss the faggots. They're so charming and such good dancers.

PEG They make excellent roommates.

GRACIE And they do have a great sense of style.

PEG They cut hair so well.

GRACIE But they gossip too much.

TOGETHER: Let's kill them.

PEG Actually, with AIDS we don't have to worry about killing off the faggots, do we?

GRACIE (Pause) No, I guess not.

(Silence)

PEG How about your father? Would you kill your father?

GRACIE My father . . . I have to think about that . . . I love him . . . I would feel great sorrow at his death . . . but . . . Yes! If it meant we could start all over in a world of women, I would do it. Would you kill Russell?

PEG Russell? He's my best friend. We grew up together. (Pause) No, I couldn't do it.

GRACIE I thought you hated men!

PEG I hate men, but I love Russell.

GRACIE Well, how the hell are we going to kill off all the men in the world if you're not willing to kill Russell?

PEG Obviously, if I'm not willing to kill Russell, we can't do it.

GRACIE Dammit!

(Blackout)

GRACIE AND PEG (Sing "Jill the Ripper")

I saw you walking home one night, so safe and sure and smug.
So unafraid of mugger, rapist, robber, punk, or thug.
I followed right behind you,
Hoping somewhere dark I'd find you,
Where I'd rope and tie and bind you,
And I'd squash you like a bug.

The next night as I followed you, you seemed as if in shock.
You walked a little faster and your knees began to knock.
And when I bared my clippers,
An enormous pair of snippers,
With my grin like Jack the Ripper's
You went running down the block.

Last night as I was following, you muttered and you prayed.
You crossed the street at least four times, my presence to evade.
I thrilled to the sensation,
In my mad imagination,
Of your imminent castration,
With my razor-sharpened blade.

Tonight I will wait patiently, 'til you come into sight.
I'll hear your heaving heartbeat, smell your sweat and feel your fright.
There's no hope of escaping,
You are done with all your raping,
And your crotch I'll be reshaping,
Or – if not – tomorrow night.

(Blackout)

Meeting the Parents: Before

(Lights come up on an empty stage. Peg rushes in)

PEG Honey, are you ready? (Looks around) Goddammit! (Searches for a note. Finds a piece of paper, reads it aloud) How do I love thee? Why do I love thee? Thou are strong, but not long. Thou are large, not unlike a barge. (Crumples paper, throws it away. Goes to phone, starts dialing. Gracie enters)

GRACIE I'm here.

PEG Where have you been? We're late!

GRACIE Almost late, but not quite.

PEG We have to be at the restaurant in fifteen minutes.

GRACIE It's only a five-minute drive from here.

PEG Let's go.

GRACIE What's the hurry? I think I want a drink first.

PEG You want a drink? You must be nervous.

GRACIE I just want a little drinkie before we meet my parents.

PEG Well, since you're having one . . . (Peg pours two drinks. Peg slugs hers down, while Gracie sips slowly and noisily) Come on, come on. We're gonna be late. I know we're gonna be late. And if we're late, your parents will blame me.

GRACIE (Still sipping) We won't be late.

PEG How do I look? (Turns around so Gracie can inspect her)

GRACIE Good. Very good.

PEG Not great?

GRACIE Not great. But, very good.

PEG What's wrong? Come on, tell me what's wrong. I can take it. Spit it out.

GRACIE It's the shoes.

PEG The shoes? What's the matter with the shoes? I polished them.

GRACIE The heels are very rundown.

PEG That's a very small detail.

GRACIE I didn't say it was important. It just keeps you from looking great.

PEG I am not a rich person. I only have one pair of shoes, so the heels get run down. Is that such a terrible thing?

GRACIE You could have gotten them fixed.

PEG How can I get them fixed when they're the only pair of shoes I have? What am I supposed to wear on my feet while the heels are being replaced? Banana leaves?

GRACIE I think black plastic garbage bags would be more practical.

PEG Your parents are going to hate me because my heels are rundown. I'll walk on my knees so they won't notice. (Gets on her knees and mimes shaking hands with someone) Hello, M and D. So nice to meet you.

GRACIE That could make things even worse.

PEG Worse? You mean they're bad now? I thought your parents were anxious to meet me.

GRACIE Anxious . . . that's an appropriate word.

PEG What did they say about me?

GRACIE My father says "I see, I see," while my mother cries softly in the background. But sometimes they switch places and my mother says "I see," so my father has a chance to cry.

PEG I see. (Cries softly)

GRACIE It must be catching.

PEG Why do they want to meet me if they're so upset?

GRACIE I didn't say they *wanted* to meet you.

PEG Why are they willing to meet me?

GRACIE I didn't say they were *willing*.

PEG What exactly did you say to me, then, when you told me about this dinner engagement.

GRACIE I said they were *going* to meet you.

PEG Let me ask you a question.

GRACIE Shoot.

PEG Do your mother and father *know* they are going to meet me tonight?

GRACIE No.

PEG Wonderful.

GRACIE I thought it would be a nice surprise.

PEG A nice surprise.

GRACIE Maybe not a nice surprise, but a . . . *surprising* surprise. Look, they've been putting this off for two months now. After tonight they *will have* met you. That part of the ordeal will be over.

PEG Thanks a lot.

GRACIE Then, next time we see them, you and I can hold hands. And maybe after that we can kiss.

PEG You plan these dramatic little scenes without thinking of anyone else, don't you? What if your parents are rude to me? What if they walk out on me?

GRACIE They won't. They're very well trained. They have excellent manners.

PEG Believe me, manners can fly right out the window when your child's a queer. I've seen it happen before, in my own family.

GRACIE Come on. Don't tell me that *your* mother was ever rude. I don't believe it.

PEG You should have seen her with my first lover. She wouldn't speak to her. Turned her back on her.

GRACIE You're kidding!

PEG It was shameful.

GRACIE I hope I haven't made a big mistake.

PEG Don't worry. You haven't.

GRACIE Oh honey, I'm so glad you feel that way.

PEG You haven't made a big mistake because I refuse to meet your parents for dinner tonight.

GRACIE Oh no!

PEG It's out of the question under the circumstances.

GRACIE But it'll be so interesting.

PEG *Interesting!* You don't care what happens, do you, as long as there's some action for you to observe? You'll probably write it all down in your journal tonight, won't you?

GRACIE What's wrong with that?

PEG I know you. I won't act in your little play. I'd love to meet your parents, but not like this. Besides, I couldn't possibly make a public appearance tonight. My heels need to be replaced.

GRACIE Oh please . . . please . . . pleeeeeeeeeeaasssssseeeeeee . . . (Gets down on her knees, begs Peg . . . no response) I guess I'd better get going then.

PEG Yes, I guess you'd better.

GRACIE You're not mad at me, are you?

PEG No, I am furious!

GRACIE I just wanted to get it over with. (Pause) What are you going to do for dinner tonight?

PEG I'll stay here and fix something.

GRACIE There's nothing to eat. I didn't have a chance to go shopping today.

PEG You're doing *everything* right, aren't you? Well, I think I'll just fast.

GRACIE Oh, please come to dinner. It's a fancy French restaurant. The food is supposed to be great. You can order whatever you want. Even escargot.

PEG (Ears pricked up) Escargot?

GRACIE I'll order them too and you can have my share.

PEG Two orders of escargot?

GRACIE I just cannot bear the thought of you starving here while I'm sitting in a beautiful, elegant restaurant, stuffing myself with delicious, rich . . .

PEG After all, your parents couldn't be *that* bad.

GRACIE Of *course* not.

PEG You're not that bad. So how could your parents be that bad?

GRACIE Exactly!

PEG And I *am* hungry. Very hungry.

GRACIE It would mean so much to me. I'll wash all the dishes for a month if you come.

(Pause)

PEG All right, I'll do it!

GRACIE Yay! Thank you, sweetie. I'll never forget this.

PEG After all, I haven't been around any parents for a long time. I've got to stay in shape. The last time I saw my parents was for Christmas.

GRACIE AND PEG (Sing "Twelve Days")

(Sung to the tune of the traditional "Twelve Days of Christmas." Peg sings the first line, and Gracie the second line, and they continue this way until the end of the song)

On my first day home for Christmas, my mother said to me:
You have no good clothes to wear.

Second Day: You've put on some weight.

Third Day: You should get a job.

Fourth Day: Visit your Aunt Ruby.

Fifth Day: Still no boyfriend!!!!???

Sixth Day: What's this in your suitcase?

Seventh Day: Do you smoke marijuana?

Eighth Day: Susan's getting married.

Ninth Day: Esther has three kids now.

Tenth Day: Are you still on foodstamps?

Eleventh Day: Your life is a disaster.

On my twelfth day home for Christmas . . . I left!

I couldn't take it anymore.

(Ending refrain)

YOU HAVE NO GOOD CLOTHES TO WEAR!

(Lights fade. Gracie and Peg exit together)

Meeting the Parents: After

(Peg and Gracie walk in slowly, separately. They slump in chairs on opposite sides of the stage)

PEG Well, that certainly was a lovely evening.

GRACIE How was I to know?

PEG How were you to know! I *told* you it was going to be awful. That's how you were to know.

GRACIE I didn't believe you.

PEG Oh no, you never believe anybody. You've got to experience everything for yourself, firsthand. Well, next time you decide on a nice little confrontation to clear the air, count me out.

GRACIE Why did they have to be so . . . so creepy?

PEG I think it's written somewhere. Ah yes, I remember. the eleventh commandment. I believe Moses brought it down from the top of whatever mountain he was on. "Thou shalt not be civil to thy child's homosexual lover."

GRACIE Thou shalt make thy child feel like shit for being queer.

PEG Yes, something like that. I forget the words, exactly. But I'm sure it's in the Bible somewhere. (Pause) And the escargot were tough! They were, without a doubt, the most disgusting escargot I have ever had in my life.

(Pause)

GRACIE I'm sorry.

PEG So am I.

GRACIE No, honey, I'm really sorry they treated you so badly. I apologize.

PEG I think it was when your father refused to pass me the salt after my third request that I started to get upset.

GRACIE They never looked at you or said a word to you.

PEG Well, thank goodness for that! I'd hate to hear what they would have said if they did.

GRACIE It was really hard to reach all the way across the table and get the salt for you.

PEG I imagine so. That must be why you spilled wine all over your mother when you did it.

GRACIE No, I did that on purpose.

PEG You did? Isn't that sweet. Thank you, baby. She deserved it.

GRACIE They deserved a lot more. Why did we sit all through that horrible meal? Why didn't we storm out right after my mother refused to shake your hand?

PEG I don't know. We should have. I was taking my cue from you.

GRACIE Why do I always do this? Why do I always figure out what to do after the opportunity is past? I'm such a wimp. I can't stand it. Especially around my parents. Why don't I just tell them off and leave it at that? Why do I keep trying to make them understand my life?

PEG Because they're your parents and you love them.

GRACIE I don't love them. I hate them. They're jerks, they're creeps, they're bigots, they're . . . Oh Peg, I'm so disappointed in them. I feel so torn up inside. Why do I let them do this to me? Why do I even care what they think? I hate them. I'm going to disown them.

PEG Come here, baby. (Gracie goes to Peg. Peg caresses, comforts Gracie) I know it's hard, isn't it? When you really see your parents for what they are.

GRACIE Goddam phoney liberal Jews. Goddam gutless, conventional, cowardly . . .

PEG That's it. Get it all out.

GRACIE Oh Peg, I feel awful.

PEG They don't understand. But maybe they will someday.

GRACIE And maybe they won't.

PEG That's right. Maybe they won't. But we know what we've got, don't we. We don't need them to tell us it's good.

GRACIE I *do* want them to tell me it's good. That's what I want. I know it's stupid. But I want it.

PEG You've got to let go of that one, baby, or you'll never be happy.

GRACIE I know. I know.

(Lights fade as they sit with their arms around each other)

Depression

(Peg is pursuing the want ads. Gracie is looking through the index of a book)

GRACIE Let's see . . . abstinence . . . coitus . . . fallatio . . . impotence . . . masturbation . . . Oops! I've gone too far. Ah, here it is! Lesbian, page 191. (Finds the page and reads) "The top rung on the ladder of eroticism can be the first step on the ladder of perversion." Hmmm. "These pathetic women lead lives of hopeless desperation. They frequent seedy saloons searching for a partner in perversion to satisfy depraved cravings. Despised by humanity, scorned by their families, these forlorn females are neurotic and depressed." (To Peg) Are you depressed?

PEG No, I'm happy.

GRACIE But it says right here in this book that all lesbians are *unhappy*.

PEG I know. I'm totally out of sync. It makes me feel terrible.

GRACIE Maybe I can think of something to depress you so that you won't feel so bad.

PEG That would be nice.

GRACIE Let me see . . . You're an outcast and considered a pervert by society. Does that depress you?

PEG Considering what society is like, I prefer to be an outcast.

GRACIE Me too. Especially since I'm Jewish. I'm more comfortable as an outcast. It's in my blood. But I've never really felt oppressed as a Jew. Maybe someday I will.

PEG Being black is still a very good oppression.

GRACIE That's true, but there's no way that you can choose it. No, when you get right down to it, homosexuality is the oppression of choice. Anyone can be queer regardless of race, religion, creed or age. Homosexuality—the equal-opportunity oppression! (Pause) Do you feel bad that you can't have a penis stuck inside of you? (No response) How about a big strong man to protect you? Do you ever miss that?

PEG Not having ever had a big strong man to protect me, I find it a difficult thing to miss.

GRACIE I see your point.

PEG How about you?

GRACIE Me? I'd much rather be protected by a big, strong woman.

PEG Aw shucks, ma'am. (They embrace)

GRACIE What about children? Does it depress you that you can't have children?

PEG Children? Are you kidding? All that work, all those dirty diapers, all that money, and for what? So some little brat can grow up and do exactly what she wants to do with her life? Forget it. Look at my poor mother. She worked and slaved and ended up with a lesbian. I was a terrible child. My mother had to put me on a leash to control me. (Pause) Still . . .

GRACIE What?

PEG Sometimes it makes me sad that you and I can't have a child together.

GRACIE I know. I feel the same way sometimes. But imagine what our child would be like. It would be completely obnoxious.

PEG It would be unbearable. And I'd end up doing all the work.

GRACIE What are you talking about? I'd make a great mother!

PEG Don't be ridiculous. You are the most undomestic person I've ever met. You don't like to cook, you don't like to sew, you don't like to clean, you don't like sweeping, you don't like doing the dishes, you don't like ironing . . .

GRACIE I *love* doing the dishes!

PEG And what else? There's a little more to having a baby than doing the dishes. Tell me one other thing you like to do around the house. (No response) You'd make a rotten mother.

GRACIE It's true. I'm not the nurturing type.

PEG Some people would call it lazy.

GRACIE I told you, I did all that stuff when I was with men.

PEG You're always telling me all the wonderful things you did for men. Why don't you do some of those things for me?

GRACIE I told you, I'm sick and tired of all that crap. I've had my life quota of cooking and cleaning.

PEG Well, it seems to me that the men got a hell of a lot better deal than I'm getting.

GRACIE All right, all right. You've convinced me. I'd make a rotten mother. Anyhow, what if it turned out to be a little girl who liked frilly dresses and makeup and boys?

PEG Or a little boy who liked to kill butterflies and hit little girls? Or twins? A *boy* who liked frilly dresses . . .

GRACIE And a girl who killed butterflies.

PEG Disgusting.

GRACIE Insupportable.

TOGETHER It's better we can't have a child.

GRACIE Well, have I succeeded in depressing you?

PEG A little. But it's fading fast. I don't understand. They must have lied to me when I was growing up.

GRACIE AND PEG (Sing together: "Misery Loves Company")

They taught me when I was a tyke
There's no one sadder than a dyke.
We seek out others who're the same
In lonely bars to share our grief and shame.

Because,
MISERY LOVES COMPANY
I was taught that was true,
MISERY LOVES COMPANY
And that's why I love you.

I grew up frightened and alone
My special sadness was my own.
I thought that I was just no good
Because I didn't yearn for motherhood.

You know that,
MISERY LOVES COMPANY
'Specially when I've had a few,
MISERY LOVES COMPANY
and that's why I love you.

But I discovered as I grew
That straight folks can feel lonely too,
And let me tell you how it looks
The saddest folks are those who write those books.

Saying,
MISERY LOVES COMPANY
Don't let them tell you that it's true,
MISERY LOVES COMPANY
and that's why I love you.

Now I am happy as a clam
Since I have found out what I am,
And since it seems I must be one
I wish every woman was a lesbian.

Because,
MISERY LOVES COMPANY
Just like the grass loves the dew,
MISERY LOVES COMPANY
But not like I love you.

Sex

(Peg and Gracie are in bed. Gracie is munching a bag of potato chips)

GRACIE Sex is so difficult for me.

PEG Don't get upset. You're good at other things—like typing.

GRACIE It's a problem. I have to solve it.

PEG Everything for you is a problem you have to solve. Why can't you just be happy with what you have?

GRACIE You know, when I slept with men, sex was never that important. Of course, if I didn't have it, I was obsessed with it. But once I was in a relationship, I'd always think, why do I make such a big fuss about it? But ever since I've been with women, sex has always been a big deal.

PEG That's because all lesbians are sex maniacs.

GRACIE I'm a pervert, and I'm not a sex maniac.

PEG That's because you are a perverted pervert. And everybody knows that perverted perverts never have any fun because they think too much. When you're making love, everything is OK.

GRACIE If everything is OK, then why isn't it OK for me to think? Why isn't it OK for me to be uptight and repressed if everything is OK?

PEG You're always expecting the earth to move. But sex isn't like that all the time. Sometimes it just feels good. Sometimes it's pleasant. And sometimes it stinks.

GRACIE I should have never read *Lady Chatterley's Lover* that first semester in college.

PEG I hesitate to ask, but what does *Lady Chatterley's Lover* have to do with us?

GRACIE Those sex scenes are engraved on my brain. I was a virgin then, and I thought that's what sex was really like. You know, the waves crashing on the rocks and the tide rolling in and rolling out, rolling in and rolling out.

PEG It's high tide for us sometimes, isn't it?

GRACIE But not all the time. Why can't it be all the time?

PEG God, I am so sick of this. Everything's been just fine for a while. So you get bored and you poke around and poke around for something to get upset about, and when you can't find anything else, you pounce on SEX! We'll probably have our *money* argument tomorrow.

GRACIE What's wrong with trying to improve our sexual relationship?

PEG It's not *our* relationship! It's you! It's *your* problem. Leave *me* out of it.

GRACIE Let me just ask you a question. (Peg burrows under the covers) If you had to choose between having sex every single day . . . no, *twice* a day for the rest of your life and never having sex again, at all, *ever* . . . what would you choose? (No response) All right, let me ask you another question. Which would you rather do: have sex or . . . read the newspaper? (Still no response) But honey, the newspaper is very dependable. Whereas sex . . . sometimes sex is a waste of time. Maybe the Catholics were right. Maybe we should have sex just to procreate. Otherwise it's a big waste of time.

PEG (Surfacing) That would totally eliminate homosexuality.

GRACIE Good point, good point, Peg. You know, when I was with men, I used to fantasize about being with women all the time. And now that I'm with women, I fantasize about men. Isn't that terrible?

PEG Yes, it is.

GRACIE I fantasize about dogs, too.

PEG I don't want to *hear* this.

GRACIE Of course, I've *always* fantasized about dogs.

PEG (Pause) Male dogs, or female dogs?

GRACIE (Pause) Both.

PEG Will you *please* SHUT UP!!!

GRACIE (Pause) Ever since I heard that a woman reaches her sexual peak at thirty-five, I always thought, "Oh boy, I can't wait! Someday, I'll be a drooling maniac!" But now I'm thirty-four, and let me tell you, unless things start improving really rapidly, my sexual peak is going to be a sexual foothill. Maybe a valley. Yes, a sexual valley would be a good way of describing it. And then, when I think that *after* thirty-five, it's all downhill . . . I'll go into a canyon. By the time I'm fifty, I'll probably be at the bottom of the Grand Canyon of sexuality! It's very depressing, very depressing.

PEG If it upsets you so much, why don't you ever say anything when we're actually making love?

GRACIE I do.

PEG When?

GRACIE Sometimes.

PEG Not very often. Not very goddam often. I can't read your mind, you now. I need to be told.

GRACIE And told, and told, and told, and told.

PEG Have you ever considered celibacy?

GRACIE You know, it's interesting you brought that up.

PEG Just as a *joke*! I was only *joking*!

GRACIE But that's the new "in" thing, celibacy. It's becoming very chic.

PEG For straight people and monks, it's chic. Not for lesbians.

GRACIE You are so narrow-minded.

PEG Listen, it takes two *not* to tango, and I ain't interested.

GRACIE You're not interested in not tangoing?

PEG That's right.

GRACIE So I guess I should have sex just because *you* want it, right?

PEG Something like that.

GRACIE You sound just like a man.

PEG Don't you say that to me. I'm a woman and I sound exactly like a woman. If you don't think women talk this way, you're wrong, because I'm a woman and I talk this way. So forget about me sounding, looking, walking, talking or acting like a man. I'm a woman, got it?

GRACIE No, I don't "got" it. What's the point of being a woman if you're going to act like a man?

PEG What's the point of being a lesbian if you don't like sex?

GRACIE I didn't say I don't like it. I'd say that I'm ambivalent.

PEG Well, what the hell point is there in being an ambivalent lesbian? If you're a lesbian, everyone defines you by who you sleep with. If you don't care that much, why go through all the hassles?

GRACIE I like the hassles.

PEG Why?

GRACIE Because it gives me something to write about.

PEG Is that all I am to you? Are we just "soon to be a major motion picture?"

GRACIE A movie! I never thought about a movie before!

PEG I was not put on this earth as a device to stimulate your creativity.

GRACIE Well, why are *you* a lesbian?

PEG Because I love women and I hate the way men are. Because sex with men was boring and sex with women isn't . . . usually. Because all of the people I fall in love with happen to be girls.

GRACIE I wish it was that simple for me.

PEG Don't you like being a lesbian?

GRACIE Oh yeah. I love it.

PEG Why?

GRACIE Because it's very chic, because it's politically correct, because I'm fed up with men, because it upsets my parents, because it's a little dangerous, because I like being oppressed, because I like breasts, because a lot of men don't like women like me, because I cannot stand the idea of being possessed by a man, because I love possessing women, because I never really felt free until I slept with women.

PEG But do you love women?

GRACIE I trust women. I understand women. But I don't think I love women like you do. (Peg turns away from her) I've written a poem for you. (From memory)

Poem for You, Number One.

They write poems, graphic poems
 About making love, fucking, sexual intercourse
 They write poems about men and women
 Then why am I afraid to speak
 of the golden dolphin I rode once as your tongue
 played with my clitoris?
 or the fir tree that shot up inside me when your
 finger played with my clitoris?
 or when you told me of the rose quartz crystal
 mountain that shattered when I buried my
 face in your cunt.
 Am I still afraid to think, to speak of such things?
 No, not any longer.

Poem for You, Number Two. Ducks.

Very few poems are written about ducks.
 And, with good reason.
 Clumsy, silly, cute, obnoxious . . .
 They waddle like ducks.
 They quack exactly like ducks.
 and have you ever seen one take to water as
 easily as a duck takes to water?
 Amazing.
 Or have you noticed the water rolling off their
 backs like water off a duck's . . .
 Et cetera, et cetera.
 The stuff of aphorisms, ducks are.
 Yes.
 But poems?
 No!
 Very difficult to write a poem about a duck.

(Pause) Which one do you like better?

PEG You're right. It is very difficult to write a poem about a duck.

(They kiss. Lights fade)

Finale

(Peg and Gracie sing a reprise of "I Don't Care")

They say I'm crazy, got no sense, but I DONT CARE.
 They may or may not take offense, but I DONT CARE.
 You see, I'm kind of independent, of a clever race descendant,
 My star is on the ascendant,
 That's why I DONT CARE.

I DONT CARE, I DONT CARE
 What people think of me
 I'm happy-go-lucky
 They say I am plucky
 So jolly and carefree.
 I DONT CARE, I DONT CARE,
 If I do get the mean and stoney stare.
 If I'm never successful, it won't be distressful
 'Cause I DONT CARE!

Some people say I think I'm it, but I DONT CARE.
 They say they don't like me a bit, but I DONT CARE.
 'Cause my good nature effervescing is one there is no distressing,
 My spirit there is no oppressing
 Just 'cause I DONT CARE.

I DONT CARE, I DONT CARE
 If people don't like me.
 I'll try to outlive it
 I know I'll forgive it
 And live contentedly.
 I DONT CARE, I DONT CARE
 If people do not try to treat me fair.
 There is naught can amaze me, dislike cannot faze me
 'Cause I DONT CARE!

Appendix

Alternative transition to "Coming Out Transformations" (page 12, line 37), with Peg playing the mother and Gracie playing the daughter:

PEG Thirty dollars?

GRACIE Yep.

PEG Hell, I'll do it for nothing. I can play your mother. It'll be easy. I'll just do and say all the most terrible and disgusting things I can imagine doing and saying.

GRACIE Great. I've got it. I'm going to go out there and come back in as myself and announce to you, that's my mother, that I, that's me, am a lesbian, are a lesbian . . . whatever.

(Gracie leaves. Peg begins to put on nail polish . . . Gracie knocks)

PEG Door's open.

GRACIE Hi, Mom.

PEG Hello, dear. How was your day?

GRACIE You sound exactly like my mother.

PEG I'm supposed to sound like her, that's the point.

GRACIE But you sound so much like her it makes me sick to my stomach.

PEG Look, let's start over.

GRACIE Don't be pushy. Have a little sympathy.

(Gracie exits, Peg puts on polish . . . Gracie knocks)

PEG Come in.

GRACIE Hi, Mom.

PEG Hello, dear. Did you have happy day?

GRACIE I can't believe it.

PEG You can't believe what?

GRACIE How much you sound like my mother.

PEG This is impossible.

GRACIE I can't do it. It's too realistic. I need to approach this situation more gradually. I need to slowly immerse myself in the intense emotion, the stark drama, the tragic conflict of the generations . . . a Greek Tragedy.

Author's Afterword

Dos LESBOS was created by me, Carolyn Myers, Alice Thompson, and Judy Gottlieb working together – although Carolyn and I did all the actual writing. We started with a vague idea of a play about two lesbians, since Alice and I wanted to do something together. Hence the title, which Alice thought up. Carolyn and I would write and bring in scenes which would be critiqued by the others. If we got stuck as writers, we would turn to improvisation, with everyone pitching in. Initially, we had ideas for several very strange scenes – kind of feminism taken to its bizarre extreme. One of the ideas was a game show, where the prize was the opportunity to castrate a rapist, entitled *Whack That Wienie*. Linking these weird scenes together would be two women talking – we weren't quite sure about what. When I brought in what I had written for these connecting scenes, it gradually became clear to us that the dialogue between two normal dykes was in fact the heart of the play. Eventually, all the bizarre scenes were dropped, except "Coming-Out Transformations." For the two original songs, we had concepts and asked David Hyman, a good friend and a very clever man, to work on them. We gave him the idea for "Jill the Ripper" and 30 minutes later, he handed us the lyrics. Dos LESBOS, while being intimate and personal to me, is also truly a collaborative vision.

List of Plays

EGO TRIP, OR I'M GETTING MY SHIT TOGETHER AND DUMPING IT ALL ON YOU
by Terry Baum

SACRIFICES, A FABLE OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT
by Carolyn Myers, Terry Baum, Michele Linfante, and Renais Winter

DAUGHTERS OF ERIN
by Carolyn Myers and Betsy Roden

GOOD FOOD
by Terry Baum, Carolyn Myers, Cynthia Moore, Charlotte Colavin,
Shelley Fields

WOMEN IN LINE
by Terry Baum

MOONLIGHTING, A PLAY ABOUT WOMEN AND WORK
by Terry Baum and Carolyn Myers

FEMALE TROUBLES, ON THE MEDICAL RIGHTS OF WOMEN
by Carolyn Myers and Dory Appel

IMMEDIATE FAMILY
by Terry Baum, with Carolyn Myers as script consultant

8 x 10 GLOSSY

by
Sarah Dreher

Production History

8 x 10 GLOSSY ran February 22, 1985, through April 7, 1985, at the Stonewall Repertory Theater, New York City.

Cast

Carter – Catherine Cannon

Ketty – Ann Wyma

Ruth – Claire Clark

Dana – Anne DuPont

Julie – Barbara Bornmann

Directed by J. L. Allen

All inquiries concerning *all* rights to this script should be addressed to Sarah Dreher, 21 Valley View Drive, Amherst, MA 01002.

Author's Notes

8 x 10 GLOSSY is a love story, about the fear of loving and the fear of being loved. A first reading of the play may give the wrong initial impression of Carter and Julie, if the reader has only their words to go on. Carter, though she jokes and appears "tough," is a sensitive, frightened woman trying to survive in a brutal world. Julie's anger at Carter comes out of her love for her, and her frustration at what their father has done to her. A deep but unexpressible concern for each other lies beneath their fighting.

8 x 10 GLOSSY requires only a simple set, an orchard ladder and a few pieces of lawn furniture. In my mind, I visualize a cozy back yard, canopied by a large apricot tree. In the distance, the sea forms a backdrop. The tones are muted and hazy, like those of a watercolor.

Editor's Notes

Yup, the author's right, "it's a love story." Not the woman meets woman kind, though woman does meet woman—sort of—or almost—but not quite—well, maybe tomorrow; but that's not the point here. What we have here is a family of lovers, none of whom has managed to love the others in the way she wanted to, needed to, could have, or whatever.

To me, this play is mainly a study of the divisions between women who love one another. Each of the characters is in constant motion toward or away from the other characters.

The playwright also captures the feel and sound of women together, of their connectedness. The male is peripheral here, but is acknowledged for the barrier he so commonly constitutes in women's dealings with one another, especially in the family. Though this script never directly discusses the topic, the play presents renderings of how society is structured for men so as to deny and prevent the connectedness between women.

The play takes a "real world" stance. It serves to remind that the lesbian who dares to proclaim her identity does so not in ignorance of "real world" opposition or consequences, but with a keener awareness of the necessities and possibilities inherent in her actions for expanding her definition of her life.

What I like most about this play is how it presents the moment-by-moment dailiness of women's courage, the connections of that courage with life, and the preservation of life, and I could add the preservation of women. (As opposed to male courage, as defined by men, which requires, it seems, not a commitment to life, but a willingness to die.)

8 x 10 GLOSSY, by its portrayal of the context of violence against women which we women live with in homes, on the street, in our hearts—the constant stream of *betrayals* against our very existence—by portraying these betrayals, and women's survival of these betrayals, this play for me captures and presents a global context.

The play also forces me to remember that sexism, and its extension, homophobia, are epidemic social diseases. And very complex, subtle, pervasive, mean little viruses they are. 8 x 10 GLOSSY tells the story of two sisters, who come together on the anniversary of their father's death. Julie, the older sister, is afraid to love. Carter is afraid to be loved. Their conflicts and temperaments explode around their perceptions of their shared history, particularly of their father.

8 x 10 GLOSSY

Act One

SCENE: The back yard of the Dwyer home in Parker's Cove, a small seacoast town in Maine. At stage left, a tall ladder reaches into the branches of an apricot tree. Offstage, right, is the garage. The house is offstage, upper right; Ruth's house offstage down left. The ocean may be visible in the distance. On-stage are a few lawn chairs and a low table. It is a late August evening, dusk is far advanced and, as the play progresses, turns to full darkness.

(Carter enters, carrying a camera case, camera, and an amorphous piece of luggage. She puts down her things, looks around with a sense of relief at being "home," climbs partway up the ladder, and opens her camera)

KETTY (Offstage) Ruth! Ruth Bessey! Can you hear me?

RUTH (Offstage) They can hear you all the way to Bangor.

KETTY There's a tent meeting out at Smith's pasture.

RUTH So what?

KETTY Want to go?

RUTH I do not. They dip.

KETTY We don't have to dip.

RUTH I might be moved.

KETTY Who cares?

RUTH All the congregationalists on the school board.

KETTY You're retiring, and I have tenure.

RUTH I don't want my name in the paper.

KETTY Come over for a drink, then.

RUTH Liquor makes me languid.

KETTY Well, languish.

RUTH I'm cleaning the kitchen.

KETTY In your negligee?

RUTH Mind your own business, Ketty Dwyer.

KETTY I need company.

RUTH When I finish the kitchen.

KETTY Let it go. Who's going to see?

RUTH You never know.

KETTY Lock your door.

RUTH They might break in.

KETTY You're cleaning the house for burglars? (Door slams off L) You're turning into an old poop, Ruth.

(Carter laughs, fiddles with her camera, sighting through the view finder. Dana enters, doesn't see Carter up the ladder)

CARTER Hi.

DANA My God, I thought you were an owl. Carter?

CARTER Yeah. Do I know you?

DANA Dana Myers.

CARTER (As they shake hands) Come here often?

DANA I'm looking for Julie.

CARTER She moved. Got married. About eight years ago.

DANA I know that.

CARTER Two blocks down. Number 53.

DANA I know that.

CARTER If this is Monday, she's at the library. If it's Tuesday, she's dining at the Pixie with Ethan. Is this Tuesday?

DANA Yes.

CARTER At the Pixie. With Ethan.

DANA I know that.

CARTER Okay.

DANA She's meeting me here afterward.

CARTER (Checks the color of the sky) Well, they ought to be coming up on the pie any minute now.

DANA Do you mind if I wait?

CARTER Suits me.

(Dana sits. Carter stares at her)

DANA (After a while) When did you get in?

CARTER Just now.

DANA How's Chicago?

CARTER Hot.

DANA How was the Thruway?

CARTER Long.

DANA How are you.

CARTER Fine.

DANA Are you on vacation?

CARTER Sort of.

DANA Your father? (Carter shrugs) That's what I was afraid of.

CARTER Afraid of?

DANA Julie's not going to be pleased.

CARTER Why not?

DANA When the subject comes up, she mutters incoherently.

CARTER He's been dead a year. Families get together over things like that, don't they?

DANA I guess so.

CARTER So what's the big deal?

DANA Don't look at me. I'm an innocent bystander. Where families are concerned, it's all psychosis.

CARTER Don't you have a family?

DANA Yep. It's all psychosis.

CARTER *Life's* all psychosis.

DANA True. I heard about your accident.

CARTER It wasn't an accident.

DANA I'm sorry.

CARTER I was beaten up by two large riot cops after assaulting a Baptist at a Gay Rights Rally. It wasn't an accident.

DANA Really, I'm sorry.

CARTER I did it on purpose. They did it on purpose.

DANA Why?

CARTER It's all right to assault Blacks, Native Americans, Jews, Hispanics, and queers. Not Baptists.

DANA Why did you do it?

CARTER He made me nervous.

DANA I hope I don't.

CARTER Not yet. Been in town long?

DANA Since January.

CARTER Then you're not visiting.

DANA No.

CARTER You're probably the first person to move to Parker's Cove since 1949.
Where are you from?

DANA New York.

CARTER Why here?

DANA It's a good place to raise children.

CARTER How many?

DANA Three.

CARTER That's a lot.

DANA Tell me about it. I think I've spent half my life pregnant.

CARTER Listen, do you know your way around here?

DANA Parker's Cove?

CARTER The Dwyer estate.

DANA Pretty well.

CARTER Turn on the yard light, would you?

DANA (Getting up to do it) Ketty says it draws bats.

CARTER Mom sees bats everywhere. It draws bugs.

DANA That's a relief. (Flicks the switch on the side of the garage. The lights come up)

CARTER The bugs draw bats. (Dana turns off the lights) They're friendly bats.

DANA (Turning the lights back on) Better?

CARTER Great (Focuses her camera on Dana) Wow.

DANA What are you doing?

CARTER You have a terrific face.

DANA You have a terrific imagination. But thank you.

KETTY (Offstage) Ruth, is that you?

DANA Me, Ketty.

KETTY Is Julie with you?

DANA No, it's . . . (Carter signals her not to tell she's there) . . . just me.

KETTY Look out for bats.

DANA (To Carter) You don't want her to know you're here?

CARTER I can't bear to break the spell. (Goes on taking pictures of Dana)

DANA Carter.

CARTER You're new in town. That's front-page stuff around here. (Comes down from ladder, still taking pictures) "Famous photojournalist uncovers Pinko-Commie plot to infiltrate God-fearing Maine community. Given key to city."

DANA I knew you were good. I didn't know you were famous.

CARTER I'm not.

DANA Successful?

CARTER I make a living. In this business, that's successful beyond belief.

DANA (As Carter takes pictures) Do you have to do that?

CARTER Evidence. Talk to me.

DANA What about?

CARTER Yourself. Pretend I'm not here.

DANA (Pause) I can't.

CARTER (Prompting) No wedding ring.

DANA I left it on the sink in the ladies' room at a restaurant.

CARTER Which restaurant?

DANA I don't know. Some plastic place outside of Meriden, Connecticut.

CARTER Symbolic gesture?

DANA Probably. I'm divorced.

CARTER Ah. Grounds?

DANA Irreconcilable differences.

CARTER What differences?

DANA We didn't get along. I think he might be brain-dead.

CARTER What does he do?

DANA As little as possible, to avoid support payments.

CARTER What do you do?

DANA As much as possible, to avoid hysteria.

CARTER Specifically?

DANA I work part-time in the bookstore.

CARTER Parker's Cove's cultural center. How did you meet my sister?

DANA P.T.A. How else?

CARTER And what do you think of our little community?

DANA I used to drive through towns like this and wonder what people *do* in them. I still don't know.

CARTER (Stops taking pictures) They admire the scenery.

DANA The first time I saw that village green, with the white church and general store, I thought I'd fallen into a Christmas card.

CARTER Town Common.

DANA What?

CARTER We call it the Town Common.

DANA I keep forgetting. Where I come from, "common" means something altogether different.

CARTER Yeah, well, we have that kind, too. "Accident." Is that the official position?

DANA There's no official position. (Takes out cigarettes) Cigarette?

CARTER No, thanks. I quit.

DANA Congratulations.

CARTER I figured brain damage *and* lung cancer were too much to worry about in one lifetime.

DANA Did they hurt you?

CARTER Enough to make an impression.

DANA Well, they won't do that to you here. They're much too polite for violence. Do you make a habit of it?

CARTER Violence?

DANA Demonstrations.

CARTER When I absolutely have to.

DANA That's what I miss most about New York. Social ferment.

CARTER Funny, you don't seem . . .

DANA What is it?

CARTER I was about to say something rude.

DANA Please. No one's been rude to me in so long, I'm beginning to think I'm dead. Sometimes I call my ex, just to hear rude.

CARTER You don't strike me as Julie's type.

DANA Maybe I remind her of you. (Carter laughs) She's been known to speak very fondly of you.

CARTER Since I made headlines?

DANA Well . . . You know how it is around here. People suspect you of having a criminal mind if you don't return your library books on time.

CARTER Yeah.

DANA So maybe she's a little miffed.

CARTER It wouldn't be the first time.

DANA She'll get over it.

CARTER All I do is disappoint her.

DANA I doubt that.

CARTER She talked me into going to Bowdoin with her. We were hot stuff. Julie made Phi Beta Kappa, and I was on the Sophomore Honor Roll. Then she graduated, and I dropped out.

DANA Why?

CARTER I guess I was homesick. So I hung around Parker's Cove for a while, then went to Chicago to study photography.

DANA Weren't you homesick in Chicago?

CARTER Well, at least I didn't look for her between classes.

DANA I've seen your pictures of her. How do you get her not to be self-conscious?

CARTER There's a trick to it. You make yourself invisible.

DANA They're beautiful.

CARTER Yeah, she is. I looked like I was put together with spare parts, and found my clothes on the floor of a laundromat. Julie was something else. Except that wedding dress. I never could warm up to that wedding dress. It reminded me of gift wrapping. Do you have a sister?

DANA No.

CARTER The day she got married, I hid out in the garage and drank myself into oblivion. Jesus, I was sick. Everything felt bruised. If you ever have a choice between cheap bourbon and riot cops, pick the cops.

KETTY (Offstage) Dana, are you still there?

DANA Yes, Ketty.

KETTY What are you doing?

(Dana looks to Carter for help. Carter shrugs)

DANA Talking to myself.

KETTY When you get bored, come in. I need help with the you-know-what.

DANA I'll be along soon.

KETTY Dana?

DANA Yes, Ketty.

KETTY You're not doing anything you shouldn't, are you?

DANA I'm pure as the driven snow.

KETTY "But, oh, how she drifted."

DANA (Mutters) Jesus.

CARTER What's the "you-know-what"?

DANA She's making a blouse for Julie's birthday. God forgive me, I'm helping.

CARTER Is it awful?

DANA Well, she can always wear it to the Pixie.

CARTER Mom's *sewing*?

DANA The woman's a National Treasure. Though I've heard her green tomato relish can reduce you to tears.

CARTER We used to pray the frost would hold off until the tomatoes were ripe. She must have a hundred jars of the stuff in the cellar, dating back to the Eisenhower Administration.

DANA When it comes to motherhood, Ketty and I are in the same class.

CARTER Oh, she's okay.

DANA I'm okay. But I'm sure not a natural. Every Halloween I send the kids out in store-bought costumes and feel guilty as hell. (Carter reaches for her camera) Sometimes I get up in the morning and tell myself, "Okay, Dana, today you start being a *real* mother." By evening I'm so tired I want to die. And *bored*. I think if I hear "Mommy, Mommy" one more time, I'll scream. They draw balloon faces and lollipop flowers, and all I see are balloon faces and lollipop flowers. Do you know what I have scotch-taped to my refrigerator door?

CARTER (Taking her picture) No. Don't move.

DANA Nothing, absolutely nothing. You're a Woman of the World, Carter, tell me something.

CARTER Sure.

DANA Why do they *always* put the sun in the upper right-hand corner?

CARTER Beats me. I never did.

DANA If I had a kid like you, I could be Mother of the Year. (Pause) And yet, if one's sick, I can't sleep. The minute school lets out, a thin hot wire of panic burns in my chest until they come up the walk. And there are moments, only with them, when I know the real meaning of joy.

CARTER I think you must be a very good mother.

DANA Well, just in case—and until science has arrived at the ultimate definition of Good Motherhood—I'm saving my pennies to pay for their therapy when they reach the Age of Insight.

CARTER "Selfless Mom Sacrifices All for Kiddies' Mental Health. Thousands Cheer."

DANA (Laughing) This is crazy.

KETTY (Offstage) Dana.

DANA Yes, Ketty.

KETTY How big are Julie's breasts?

DANA *What?*

KETTY Her breasts. How big?

DANA How should I know?

KETTY I thought you might have looked.

DANA No, I haven't looked. (To Carter, who is reaching for her camera)
Freeze. Right there.

KETTY Next time you see her, look.

DANA Christ in a Jacuzzi. (Fumbles for a cigarette)

CARTER Dana.

DANA What?

CARTER You're blushing.

DANA I am *not*.

CARTER Yeah, you are.

DANA Matches. Where the hell are the matches?

CARTER Why are you blushing?

DANA I'm *not blushing*.

CARTER Okay. (Under her breath) Blushing.

DANA Carter. Do you have a match?

CARTER Light it off your face.

DANA Want to live to see thirty?

(Ketty enters, in a flurry)

KETTY It's a disaster! (Sees Carter) Baby! (Embraces her) Thank God. I haven't had a decent Tom Collins all summer.

CARTER Coming up. Dana?

DANA No.

KETTY (Hiding blouse) Julie isn't here, is she?

CARTER Maybe she and Ethan stopped off home to Do It.

KETTY I didn't spend thirty-one hours in labor with you to have you talk dirty. (Carter exits, patting Dana on the shoulder as she passes) Have you and Carter been having a nice talk?

DANA For the most part.

KETTY Is Gail with her?

DANA No. She's had a rough summer.

KETTY If she'd been in any real trouble, she'd have called.

DANA Not according to Julie.

KETTY Julie's overprotective. Older sisters are like that.

DANA Don't you worry about her?

KETTY If I let myself worry about Carter, I'd never sleep again.

DANA I hope I can let go when my time comes.

KETTY You will. You either let them go, or you lose them. There's nothing natural about motherhood.

DANA I wish someone had told me that ten years ago.

KETTY You wouldn't have listened.

DANA I'd have listened, but I wouldn't have believed it. My God, some day they'll learn to *drive*.

KETTY You find ways to live with it.

DANA I hope so. Jenny's going to be exactly like Carter. Every time I turn around she's stuck in something, or falling off of something. If I take her to the emergency room for stitches one more time, they're going to report me for child abuse.

KETTY Well, you develop little rituals to keep them safe. Whenever Carter was out prowling around the town, I'd turn on the cellar light. It was nonsense, of course, but it made me feel I was doing something. Don't tell.

DANA By the time Jenny's Carter's age, they'll be selling tickets for shuttle flights to the moon. And I know who's going to be first in line.

KETTY (As Carter enters) Second in line.

CARTER You're out of gin. Did you know you left the cellar light on again?

KETTY It's a good thing your father isn't here. He'd sit me down and make me figure out how much electricity I'd wasted. Down to the kilowatt second.

CARTER Yeah, he's probably up there trying to convince them to turn out the stars.

KETTY One of the joys of widowhood is the freedom to leave the lights on.

CARTER (Holds up bottle) Want some of this?

KETTY Not on your life.

CARTER I can run to the store.

KETTY I'll keep. I don't know how you can drink that without ice.

CARTER (Climbing up ladder) Most of the places I end up, they don't have ice. The amazing thing is how I can drink it at all.

KETTY Ed had terrible taste in liquor.

CARTER Godawful.

KETTY It's probably what killed him.

DANA Are you comfortable up there?

CARTER Fine.

KETTY She spent half her childhood up that ladder.

CARTER I thought I could rise above my problems. If I believed that now, I'd never come down.

DANA What happened to the blouse?

KETTY It got caught up in the machine.

CARTER Maybe you should have started with something easy, like throw pillows or placemats.

KETTY Julie doesn't need throw pillows or placemats.

DANA At the moment, I'm not so sure she needs that blouse. (Takes it) Well, I'll see if anything can be salvaged.

CARTER Is there anything you don't do?

DANA The year my marriage was breaking up, I took every class I could find on homemaking. I have domestic arts up the wazoo.

CARTER Playing perfect wife?

DANA I wanted him to think about what he's missing, and gag on regret. (Exits to house)

CARTER If there were more like her in Parker's Cove, I never would have left home.

KETTY Julie seems fond of her.

CARTER I think the feeling's mutual.

KETTY Carter, are you all right?

CARTER Sure. Why not?

KETTY Dana got me to wondering. Was it terrible in jail?

CARTER Jail was fine. A gold-mine of inspiration. How's Ruth?

KETTY Just between us, I think she's getting old. She doesn't want to do anything.

CARTER I heard what you wanted her to do, go dipping at a tent meeting.

KETTY It might have been fun. I never thought I'd look forward to Labor Day.

CARTER Do you miss Dad?

KETTY Your father wasn't exactly the life of the party. But he helped me pass the time, fetching and carrying. (Sees the look on Carter's face) Don't pout. I'm not maligning him.

CARTER I'm not pouting.

KETTY I do miss him. He was a pompous ass at times, but he was my dear pompous ass. (Laughs fondly) Do you remember how he was always announcing his intentions? (Clears her throat) "Guess I'll read the paper now." "Guess I'll go on up to bed now." The night he died, I swear I expected him to sit up in that hospital bed and say, "Guess I'll pass on now."

CARTER Nobody dies in Parker's Cove. They "pass on" or "go away," or leave us." Or we "lose them." Children are "taken by the Lord." The only things that die are dogs, cats, and houseplants.

KETTY He was a good man, Carter. Your father was a good man.

CARTER I know.

KETTY Every Thursday night he went down to the fire station and repaired broken toys to give to poor children at Christmas. And for the rest of the week he'd describe it to me in minute detail. Every nail, every screw, every drop of paint. Every damn Thursday night for thirty-three years.

CARTER Mom . . .

KETTY Ed Dwyer was the most boring man I ever met. (Shouts) Are you listening, Ruth? Ed Dwyer was a six-foot, 240-pound bore. He was even more boring than your husband.

RUTH (Offstage) Impossible.

CARTER (Startled) Mom . . .

KETTY (To Carter) One night, after Julie was married and you had gone away. I sat in the living room and watched him read the newspaper. He'd turn the page, give the paper a quick little snap, and fold it very neatly in half, top to bottom. He'd read down every column, sliding the paper up through his hands. I'd watch it grow longer at the top and shorter at the bottom until the top bent over. Then he'd turn it and read the other side. And suddenly, quite unexpectedly, I heard myself say, "Julie has her family. Carter has her career. Ed, what on God's green earth are we going to do with the next twenty years?"

CARTER Mom, are you all right?

KETTY He stood up and yawned—he always yawned like a hound baying at the moon—and said, "Well, Mother, guess I'll see if there's any coffee left from dinner." "Mother," he called me. "Mother." I wasn't his damn mother.

CARTER Can I get you anything?

KETTY I'm sorry. I'm going on like an old fool, aren't I?

CARTER (Uncertainly) It's . . . okay.

KETTY He tried to do right by you. Remember that. No matter what he did, he thought it was the right thing.

CARTER He did fine by me, Mom.

KETTY Never watch a man read a newspaper. It's the kiss of death. Do you know the last thing he said to me? "Looks like I won't get the apricots picked this year, Mother."

CARTER He never picked them, I did, remember? Every year I came home the last week in August and picked the apricots.

KETTY I really believe he thought he did it.

CARTER Are you having a bad time, Mom?

KETTY With a few exceptions, I'm having a very good time. And why that guilty look, Miss?

CARTER I should visit you more.

KETTY You should not. If I have any complaints, I'll make them known.

KETTY Well, I guess Julie makes up . . .

KETTY I have a job, and I have friends. Now, where do you go from here?

CARTER I don't know. I'm between projects.

KETTY Why didn't you bring Gail?

CARTER She had other plans. We're not joined at the hip, you know. Look, let me run over and see if Ruth has any gin.

KETTY Better not. She's pretending she doesn't drink.

CARTER I'll play dumb. Maybe we'll get lucky.

(Carter starts to exit as Julie enters)

JULIE Well, if it isn't Margaret Bourke-White. Staying long?

CARTER Hi, Jem.

JULIE You should have told us you were coming. We'd have slain the fatted calf.

CARTER Did I do something wrong?

JULIE You do something wrong?

KETTY Don't squabble, girls. You're too old. How was the Pixie?

JULIE Raunchy.

KETTY Have you had a fight with Ethan?

JULIE No.

KETTY Then give your sister a kiss and make her feel welcome.

JULIE I swore off incest. (To Carter) Social visit, or are you hiding from the police?

CARTER Oh, boy. (Takes Julie's picture)

JULIE What are you doing?

CARTER I want to remember this moment.

KETTY Stop it, both of you. Sit down and be pleasant. (Julie sits in a chair. Carter climbs to the top of the ladder) Not so high, dear. We can't see you. (Carter doesn't budge) Julie?

JULIE Please come down, Carter.

(Carter moves to a lower step)

KETTY Now.

(Everyone looks at everyone else. No one can think of anything to say)

JULIE (Finally) How's Chicago?

CARTER Hot.

JULIE It's cooler here.

CARTER It's *Arctic* here.

JULIE I'm sorry.

CARTER Forget it.

KETTY (To Julie) What's Ethan up to?

JULIE At the moment, lusting after the baby sitter.

KETTY Don't tell me he's getting like *that*.

JULIE It's all a front. Actually, he's so Victorian he still turns out the light to undress. If I want to make love, I have to do the Dance of the Seven Veils just to get his attention.

CARTER I think I was better off not knowing that.

JULIE Why?

CARTER Rich fantasy life.

JULIE Stick around. Some of the local goings-on would make the Dance of the Seven Veils look like the Nutcracker Suite.

CARTER The last time I was here, half the women in town were on the Valium circuit. The other half were sleeping around.

KETTY Not your sister.

JULIE Not our mother.

KETTY Well, I like *that*. Am I too old, or just too dull?

JULIE You're our mother.

KETTY Does that make me something off a Hallmark card?

CARTER Better get your foot out of your mouth, Jem. There are toothmarks on your shoes.

JULIE I'm sorry, I didn't mean . . .

KETTY I could surprise you.

CARTER Mom, nothing you'd do would surprise us. (To Julie) Right?

JULIE Absolutely.

CARTER Actually, if you were pregnant, that would surprise me.

KETTY It's been known to happen.

JULIE How?

KETTY Aliens.

CARTER "Middle-aged woman impregnated by visitor from Outer Space. 'You could have knocked me over with a feather,' says expectant mother."

JULIE (With an edge) I think this family's made enough headlines. (Carter pours herself a drink) That stuff'll rot your brain (Carter shrugs) Carter's answer to everything, the noncommittal shrug.

CARTER Julie . . .

JULIE That must be why we never hear from you. You can't shrug on paper.

CARTER I'm really glad I came home, Julie. It's almost as much fun as jail.

JULIE Coming from you, I suppose that's a compliment.

CARTER Jesus.

KETTY If you two are determined to argue, I'm going inside.

CARTER We won't argue.

JULIE We're going to argue.

CARTER We're going to argue.

KETTY Well, try to be nice about it. (Exits)

CARTER Let's have it.

JULIE This has to stop.

CARTER Okay.

JULIE You don't know what I'm talking about.

CARTER Haven't a clue. (Julie takes out a newspaper clipping and hands it to her) Gosh, you carry my picture with you at all times. (Looks at it) Pretty good likeness.

JULIE It's a perfect likeness.

CARTER Composition's terrible. I can do better with an Instamatic.

JULIE You haven't seen this before?

CARTER Nope.

JULIE It made the wire services.

CARTER Yeah, well, I've been out of circulation. Heard about it, though.

JULIE It made quite an impression in Parker's Cove.

CARTER At the moment that picture was taken, I was being bashed over the head by a goon in a white helmet. I wasn't thinking about how you'd explain it to your bridge club.

JULIE Carter, why do you do these things?

CARTER Because they have to be done.

JULIE By you?

CARTER I don't see *you* doing it.

JULIE I'm not going to feel guilty for your life.

CARTER Neither am I.

JULIE Do you have to get into *fight*s?

CARTER Two of my friends lost their jobs this summer. Another was raped. We can't go out on the streets after dark, because gangs of teenaged pricks have declared open season on queers. If you can come up with a creative solution to that problem, I sure would be interested in hearing it.

JULIE Let it blow over.

CARTER Goddamn it, it doesn't blow over. Those people have to hate to live. If they didn't hate, they'd spend their lives hiding in their dirty socks. And hate feeds on winning.

JULIE Don't give me politics. I'm talking about *you*.

CARTER *I'm* talking about survival. Have you ever seen the inside of a good old-fashioned gay bar? They stink. They stink of toilets, and fear, and despair.

JULIE Aren't you afraid?

CARTER You *bet* I'm afraid.

JULIE Oh, Carter.

CARTER I'm sorry if I'm messing up your world, Big Sister. I'm trying to leave a bit of mine standing for the next generation.

JULIE This (Picture) is too much to pay.

CARTER It's the going rate.

JULIE I worry.

CARTER Worry about Ethan.

JULIE It always comes back to that, doesn't it?

CARTER What?

JULIE What I've done with my life.

CARTER At least I haven't called it repulsive.

JULIE I was a 20-year-old prig when I said that. Give me a *little* credit.

CARTER You could have been anything. You married a druggist with hair in his ears.

JULIE I couldn't have "been anything." I don't have your courage.

CARTER When you walked down that aisle, you walked straight into a steel vault and slammed the door.

JULIE Ethan takes care of me.

CARTER *I'd* have taken care of you. All those dreams you had. When it came down to it, the only dream you bought was the American Dream.

JULIE (Wearily) This is such an old argument.

CARTER (Kicks the ladder) *Damn* it. I wanted more for you.

JULIE (Realizing Carter is upset, reaches toward her) Please, Carter . . .

CARTER (Moves away so casually it might be unconscious) You're right. It's an old argument.

JULIE (Pause) What are you doing here?

CARTER I came home to pick the apricots. It's a tradition.

JULIE Ethan can pick the apricots.

CARTER Have I been disowned? Nobody told me.

JULIE Carter . . .

CARTER Gosh, something like *that*, you should have let me know.

JULIE It's about tomorrow, isn't it?

CARTER A postcard would have been enough.

JULIE You're here because of *him*.

CARTER Yeah, okay, I am. Big deal.

JULIE I *knew* you'd do this.

CARTER I thought Mom might need me.

JULIE Did you?

CARTER Of course, she's acting kind of strangely. Not as strangely as you, but strangely.

JULIE Did she ask you to come?

CARTER No.

JULIE Then she doesn't need you.

CARTER Thanks, Jem. That makes me feel warm all over.

JULIE You don't remember him, Carter.

CARTER I remember him.

JULIE You remember all the wrong things. You try to make it nice. It wasn't nice.

CARTER *Damn* it, it's my life.

JULIE So what are you planning to do?

CARTER I don't know. Get a little evergreen, maybe. Plant it . . .

JULIE Wonderful. A living memorial.

CARTER It's barren out there.

JULIE If you have your heart set on shrubbery, we'll do shrubbery. But let me do it, not you.

CARTER Why not?

JULIE Because I can't bear the thought of you digging in the ground, in this heat, sweating to please him. I just can't bear it.

CARTER What difference does it make?

JULIE It's obscene.

CARTER Your sweat's as obscene as mine.

JULIE I'll ask Ethan to do it.

CARTER Ethan takes care of you. Ethan picks the apricots. Ethan tends the grave. Where the hell do *I* fit in?

JULIE All right, plant your evergreen. And bury this (Picture) with it. It'll give him something to brag about, wherever he is.

CARTER Lay off.

JULIE He'd have *loved* it. He'd have stood there and cheered you on.

CARTER Do you think I *enjoyed* that?

JULIE Didn't you?

CARTER No.

JULIE He would have. You know he would have.

CARTER He taught me how to get what I want. If it weren't for him, I'd be busting ass to make a few bucks touching up 8 x 10 glossies for the local brides-to-be.

JULIE If you did as good a touch-up job on them as you've done on *him*, you'd be famous in six months.

CARTER He taught me to stand up for what I believe.

JULIE He taught you to go at life like a runaway freight.

CARTER At least I go at life.

JULIE This isn't how it was supposed to be.

CARTER You wanted to argue, we're arguing. (Notices Julie's face beginning to crack) Don't do that, Julie. I mean it. Don't *do* that.

JULIE What?

CARTER You're going to cry.

JULIE So what?

CARTER I can't yell at you if you cry.

JULIE Ignore it.

CARTER I can't ignore it. You used to get me down from that tree by looking up at me and crying.

JULIE I'm frustrated, that's all. It's all coming out wrong. I can't find the right words. When that happens, I cry.

CARTER Well, *stop*.

JULIE *Ignore it.*

CARTER *I can't.*

JULIE For God's sake. You're so *conventional*.

RUTH (Offstage) Carter, is that you down there?

CARTER Yes, Mrs. B.

RUTH Welcome home.

CARTER Thank you.

RUTH Lovely to hear your voice again.

CARTER Do you have any gin, Mrs. B? Mom's desperate.

RUTH Not a drop. Come over when you get the chance.

CARTER (To Julie) Jesus, I wonder what she's heard over the years.

JULIE Plenty. (Takes out a cigarette) Do you have a match?

CARTER No. I quit.

JULIE (Rummaging through her purse) Well, don't get sanctimonious. You're obnoxious enough already.

CARTER Do you mean that?

JULIE No, I don't mean that.

CARTER *Jem?*

JULIE *What?*

CARTER I didn't know the picture would get in the paper.

JULIE I know you didn't. Just think, you're the first native of Parker's Cove to be famous.

CARTER Maybe they'll put up a statue to me, down by the Civil War monument. (Takes picture of the house) For post cards.

JULIE Why do I love you and want to kill you at the same time?

CARTER It's a mystery. (Takes Julie's picture)

JULIE Cut that out.

CARTER What can I say? Your face turns me on. (Offers her hands) Friends?

JULIE Friends. (Takes Carter's hand, holds it for a moment)

CARTER Something wrong?

JULIE I've missed you.

(Dana enters)

DANA Thank God it finally quieted down out here.

CARTER Did you fix it?

DANA I tried.

JULIE What's Mom up to?

DANA I don't know, it's all a lie, and besides, I promised I wouldn't tell.

JULIE I'm going to be humiliated, aren't I?

DANA (Touches Julie's face) No, Rabbit, you won't be humiliated.

(Carter snaps their picture)

JULIE Damn it, Carter.

CARTER You're cute when you're mad.

JULIE Someday I'm going to break that camera over your head.

CARTER Ruin my career and I'll move home and become a parasite on my family.

JULIE You probably would.

CARTER I'll pull the shades and wither away. Once a month I'll walk downtown in a ragged bathrobe, a wild look in my eye and my hair in disarray, and all the gossips will whisper, "There goes that crazy Dwyer girl." You'll be shunned at the annual clambake.

JULIE Okay, Carter.

CARTER If you're invited anywhere, I'll follow and peer through the windows. Small boys will dare each other to touch the house. Your children will have to transfer to Parochial School, and Ethan's customers will take their business to the Bangor Mall.

DANA The locals will *never* go out of town to shop. It's a capital offense.

CARTER On foggy nights, I'll prowls the beach and terrify fornicating adolescents.

JULIE Not the beach.

CARTER The beach.

JULIE You promised.

CARTER Eighteen years ago.

JULIE It still holds. You ruined my life out there.

DANA On the beach?

JULIE Once, when we were kids, I thought she was lost in the fog. I wandered around for hours, looking for her. And suddenly I knew, for the first time and deep inside, that life was dangerous. Carter hasn't learned that yet.

CARTER Sure I have.

JULIE I realized that, from then on, there'd always be that pocket of fear that could open and pull me inside. For the rest of my life, I'd live with the possibility of terror. (To Carter) You, meanwhile, had taken the shortcut home through the beach roses, and were sitting at the kitchen table, covered with scratches, placidly eating a tuna fish sandwich.

CARTER And knowing, for the rest of *my* life, I'd live with the possibility of tuna fish.

JULIE My childhood was destroyed, and *you* ate tuna fish.

DANA Mine was destroyed under the bleachers after a high school football game.

CARTER Mine was destroyed in seventh grade, when someone wrote "queer" on my locker in lipstick.

JULIE I didn't know about that.

CARTER I wasn't sure what it meant, but I knew enough not to talk about it.

DANA You seem to have gotten over that.

CARTER Yeah. Four years later, I made the big announcement: "I'm a lesbian, deal with it." I was a tough little bastard in those days.

DANA What happened?

CARTER Mom figured I'd outgrow it, and by the time I didn't she was used to the idea. Dad said he was glad he'd taught me to stand up for myself, 'cause I sure as hell was going to need it.

DANA And Julie?

(Carter hesitates)

JULIE I behaved abominably.

CARTER If you hadn't, I'd be left out when my friends tell horror stories.

JULIE You don't have to be sarcastic.

CARTER I'm not.

DANA It probably hasn't occurred to you, but this is a rather odd family.

CARTER Thank God.

JULIE Only Carter can make normality sound like an illness.

CARTER Isn't it?

JULIE Self-righteousness is.

DANA Are you sure you want to fight in front of company?

JULIE What company?

DANA Me.

JULIE You're not company.

DANA Every time *Ketty* says that, I end up doing the dishes.

CARTER I wonder how many dishes she's washed in her life.

JULIE I don't want to know. That's how many I'll have done when I'm her age.

CARTER Switch to paper.

JULIE Every time I passed a tree, I'd feel guilty.

CARTER "Kooky housewife endures lifetime of backbreaking labor to save forests. 'I did it for the children,' gasps dying mother of two."

JULIE Dishes and terror. Is that all there is?

CARTER Well, there's always . . . green tomato relish.

JULIE Green tomato relish is a sign of true despair.

DANA There's Monhegan Island.

CARTER Hey, you two going out there?

JULIE (Quickly) Sometime, maybe.

CARTER I'd sell my soul to go along. The two most photogenic women I ever met, surrounded by privacy and scenery.

JULIE I'm not pretty.

CARTER Character. I'm talking character. (Goes to snap their picture) "Sicko runaway Moms." Something bothering you, Dana?

DANA What?

CARTER You went out of focus.

DANA (Looking at Julie) Not me.

CARTER (Catches the look) As Dorothy Parker once said, "I have to go to the bathroom." (Starts to exit) "I really have to make a phone call, but I'm too polite to say so." (Exits)

JULIE I wish I didn't say awful things to her.

DANA As awful as "Sometime. Maybe"? (Pause) What's going on, Julie?

JULIE Nothing.

DANA I thought we were all set.

JULIE Something came up.

DANA What?

JULIE I don't know. Something.

DANA What something?

JULIE Something.

DANA Carter.

JULIE She'll be gone by the weekend.

DANA Then what . . .

JULIE I don't *know* what.

DANA We've never been together for a whole day. Without children, without telephones or errands. Not once, in eight months.

JULIE We'll go some other time.

DANA Do you remember what it took to arrange this? Your kids, my kids, Ethan, your mother . . .

JULIE Some other time.

DANA It'll be another hundred years before the next alignment.

JULIE I'm sorry.

DANA "Sorry" doesn't do it. I want to wake up next to you. I want to walk on the beach and hold your hand. I want to watch the Late Show on a broken-down television with your head on my shoulder. (Pause) You wanted it too, didn't you?

JULIE I guess I did.

DANA It's the same old thing. I can get just so close, and all of a sudden you have to make a phone call, or run to the store, or do the laundry. Do you know how much Goddamn *laundry* you do? (Starts to cry)

JULIE (Going to her) Don't, Dana.

DANA (Fumbles in her pocket) Do you have a tissue?

(Julie stiffens, goes to her purse, gets one, and hands it to Dana silently)

JULIE (After a pause) Maybe we should call it off.

DANA You already called it off.

JULIE Not the trip, us.

DANA What?

JULIE Maybe we should . . .

DANA Why? For God's sake, Julie, *why*?

JULIE I don't know.

DANA *Julie.*

JULIE (Angry) Why did you pull away from me?

DANA My nose was running. It isn't my fault, God made me that way. When I cry, my nose runs.

JULIE Jesus, I'm all mixed up.

DANA What is this Rabbit?

JULIE *I can't answer your questions.*

DANA I've told you a dozen times, it doesn't have to be anything you can't handle. You love me, don't you?

JULIE I want to.

DANA What do you mean, "want to"? (Pause) What the hell do you mean?

JULIE Something stops me.

DANA Ethan?

JULIE Of course not.

DANA The children? Is it me? Is it something I . . .

JULIE Something in *me*. I can't let it go. I'm lost, and I can't find the way out.

DANA Maybe if you get off by yourself, be alone for a while . . .

JULIE I'm always alone.

DANA Thank you.

JULIE I didn't mean that.

DANA You meant it.

JULIE Don't *push*.

DANA I never pushed you. Never.

JULIE What do you call this?

DANA Okay. One question. Are we going to the island, or aren't we?

JULIE I don't . . .

DANA Yes or no, Julie. No "I don't knows." Yes, or no? (Silence) Well, I'm going. With you or without you.

JULIE Fine. Go.

DANA With you? Or without you?

JULIE Dana, please, try to understand. I'm mixed . . .

DANA You're not mixed up, you're *fucked* up. Up down, and sideways.
(Exits)

(Julie takes out a cigarette, lights it, and returns the lighter to her purse. Carter enters)

JULIE What's up?

CARTER Not much.

JULIE Make your phone call?

CARTER I tried.

JULIE Couldn't you get through?

CARTER I got through. Where's Dana?

JULIE She went home.

CARTER (Starts up ladder) Want to give me a hand with the apricots?

JULIE At this hour?

(Carter comes down ladder, pours herself a drink)

CARTER Jem, do you ever get homesick?

JULIE Not often. I live here. Do you?

CARTER Sometimes. (Pause) What if I moved back?

JULIE Here?

CARTER Yeah.

JULIE Sorry, I'm not in the mood for jokes.

CARTER I'm serious.

JULIE You're crazy.

CARTER I want to sit in the moonlight and watch the ocean. What's crazy about that?

JULIE What about Gail?

CARTER She'll get by.

JULIE Has something happened?

CARTER No. I want to come home, that's all. I belong here.

JULIE You don't belong here.

CARTER Shit.

JULIE Parker's Cove isn't *you*. That's all I meant.

CARTER Sure.

JULIE My God, this has to be the worst day of my life.

CARTER It's because I'm a lesbian, isn't it?

JULIE You always drag that into it.

CARTER It's part of my life. Try it. Get to know what nervous is.

JULIE Do you hate what you are?

CARTER I don't hate what I am, *you* hate what I am. And frankly, Big Sister, that makes it a bit rough.

JULIE I've never hated you. At my worst, I never hated you.

CARTER So why don't you want me here?

JULIE Oh, Carter, what would you do?

CARTER Wedding and graduation pictures.

JULIE Wonderful.

CARTER I'll let my hair grow. Dress differently. Maybe get married. We can make a foursome with you and Ethan at the Pixie.

JULIE And within a year, you'll have fallen for some woman.

CARTER I think I've already fallen for some woman.

JULIE Gail.

CARTER Dana.

JULIE (*Angry*) For *God's* sake.

CARTER Hey, it was a joke, okay? A joke? Ha-ha?

JULIE Very funny.

CARTER You're touchy tonight.

JULIE You're not?

CARTER I'm beat, that's all.

JULIE So am I.

CARTER Trundle off home if you want. I won't be insulted.

JULIE Not until I've had five minutes of decent conversation with you.

CARTER Can I have one of these? (*Cigarettes*)

JULIE Don't ask me. They're Dana's.

CARTER Well, good old Dana won't mind.

JULIE I thought you quit.

CARTER Borrow your lighter?

JULIE Help yourself. (*Carter picks up Julie's purse*) Don't rummage. I'll find it.

CARTER (*Rummaging*) What's this? (*Pulls out a bottle of pills*)

JULIE (*Grabs for it*) Nothing.

CARTER (*Keeping it away*) Nothing, shit.

JULIE Antihistamines.

CARTER In all the colors of the rainbow? These get you up, these get you down, these get you over, and these get you through.

JULIE So they get me through.

CARTER Why?

JULIE Why what?

CARTER Why are you taking these things?

JULIE I've had it. I have really had it. (*Starts to exit*)

CARTER Where are you going?

JULIE To the Pixie, where no one asks why.

CARTER I'm sorry, Jem. I'm only concerned.

JULIE Don't be.

CARTER If I peddled this stuff on the streets of Chicago, I'd be a wealthy woman.

JULIE Be my guest.

CARTER How do you get it?

JULIE My husband's a pharmacist.

CARTER Barefoot and pregnant isn't good enough? He wants you placid, too?

JULIE For God's sake.

CARTER Are you unhappy?

JULIE Who's *happy*? When was the last time you saw someone *happy*?

CARTER Times Square? New Years Eve?

JULIE *Happy*, for the love of Heaven.

CARTER Okay, bad word. Wrong word. Butterflies and circuses. Clowns. Roller coasters. Small children barfing cotton candy on pink dresses.

JULIE How does Gail do it?

CARTER Sometimes she does it, sometimes she doesn't.

JULIE Did you have a fight?

CARTER Kind of.

JULIE Well, fix it. Call her back and . . .

CARTER I think I'll let it ride.

JULIE Don't be stubborn, call her back.

CARTER Maybe I'll run over and see what I can get going with your girlfriend.

JULIE Stay away from her, Carter. I mean it. Stay away from her.

CARTER Hey, I'm only kidding. You don't have to come across like a jealous . . . Well, well.

JULIE Carter . . .

CARTER So that's how it is.

JULIE It *isn't* anything.

CARTER You and Dana.

JULIE We are *not* lovers.

CARTER This is a real kick, you know that? You get on *me* for making headlines, and all the while you're tiptoeing through the tulips with Ms. New York while Ethan hustles drugs to keep you in roast beef and scenery.

JULIE It isn't like that.

CARTER Yeah? What's it like? (Julie storms off. Carter climbs the ladder to shout after her) What's it like, Julie? Exactly what's it like?

(Blackout)

Act Two

A few minutes later. Carter is up the ladder, contemplating Julie's pills. Ketty enters.

KETTY (A little tired and exasperated) Carter, what did you say to your sister?

CARTER (Slips the pills into her pocket) I don't know, why?

KETTY She's washing the dishes.

CARTER Is that bad?

KETTY They're not dirty. Baby, I love having you here, but this constant bickering . . .

CARTER I'm sorry, Mom. She pissed me . . . made me mad.

KETTY I don't want excuses. I want it to stop.

CARTER I'll really try, honest.

KETTY You're not children anymore.

CARTER I know.

KETTY If you can't control your temper, I'd rather you stayed away.

CARTER Hey, it wasn't all *me*.

KETTY It goes for both of you. Do your squabbling at Julie's house.

CARTER In front of the druggist?

KETTY I don't know what you have against Ethan.

CARTER He took my sister.

KETTY I know how you feel, baby, but she wanted it that way.

CARTER He'd better be good to her. Is he?

KETTY Of course he is.

CARTER You sure? She seems kinda tense.

KETTY Ask *her* about that.

CARTER I did.

KETTY Nicely?

CARTER Not really.

KETTY Carter, you're twenty-eight years old. You should know these things by now.

CARTER Yeah, I guess I should.

KETTY I can't go on trying to keep peace between you. It wears me out.

CARTER Me, too, I really love her, Mom.

KETTY She thinks you're here because of your father.

CARTER What if I am, for God's sake? Isn't it natural?

KETTY I suppose.

CARTER Then why is everyone being so *weird* about it?

KETTY It's hard to explain . . .

CARTER The one time in my life I do something normal, and you all treat me like a freak.

KETTY Why can't you just forget about it?

CARTER Forget him? Forget my father?

KETTY It only brings up unhappy memories.

CARTER *What* unhappy memories. I don't have unhappy memories. Do you?

KETTY He could be difficult.

CARTER Everyone's difficult. *I'm* difficult. *You're* difficult. God knows Julie's difficult.

KETTY I won't be put in the middle of this, Carter.

CARTER In the middle of what?

KETTY You and Julie. If you can't work it out between you . . .

CARTER I don't even know what we're supposed to work out.

KETTY I'm *tired*. I want a little peace. Is that too much to ask?

CARTER Okay, I'm sorry. Guess I'm kind of raw.

KETTY Well, you've had a long trip.

CARTER Right.

KETTY Why don't we forget all this and go to a movie?

CARTER Tomorrow, huh? I didn't sleep much last night. You go with Ruth.

KETTY Can I trust you here?

CARTER Sure. If things get out of hand, we'll call Dana to referee.

KETTY You like her, don't you?

CARTER (*Eagerly*) Sure do.

KETTY (*Laughing*) Behave yourself.

CARTER You know me. All talk. Unfortunately. (*Dana enters*) Oh, God.

DANA Is Julie still here?

KETTY She's washing the dishes.

DANA She gets out of cooking one night a week and comes over here to do the dishes?

KETTY If you want anything to eat, there's tuna fish.

CARTER Good old Down East cooking. Tuna fish. Back in Chicago, they think we sit around stuffing ourselves on lobster.

KETTY You're welcome to do it, if you want to smell like a tidepool.

CARTER Go to the movies, Mom.

DANA (As Ketty leaves) Would you tell Julie I'm here?

KETTY She might be in the shower.

CARTER The shower?

KETTY She said she was going to wash and change.

CARTER Why doesn't she just move back in?

KETTY Sometimes I wonder. (Exits)

DANA (To Carter) Still out on a limb?

CARTER Yeah.

DANA Should I go in, or do you think she'll come out.

CARTER That's the sixty-four dollar question.

DANA What?

CARTER Nothing. We had a fight.

DANA So did we.

CARTER She really *is* having a bad day. Was it your fault?

DANA Probably. Was it yours?

CARTER I'm not sure. When I get mad, I lose all sense of proportion. By the way, I know. About the two of you.

DANA Then you know a lot more than I do. Are you coming down to my level, or do I have to keep looking up to you?

CARTER (Coming down) Do you mind? About me knowing?

DANA It depends on what you know.

CARTER You and Julie. As Judy Garland once said, "How long has this been going on?"

DANA Dreamer.

CARTER Hey, you can be straight with me, you'll pardon the pun. I've heard of such things.

DANA Did *she* say . . .

CARTER She denied everything. Stage one. Stage two is, "The important thing is to love. It doesn't matter what sex they are." I handled it with all the sensitivity of Attila the Hun. I hope I didn't make a mess for you.

DANA You couldn't make it any more of a mess than it already is.

CARTER Jesus, is this village gossip?

DANA It's nothing. Absolutely nothing.

CARTER You're not lovers?

DANA Not as far as I know.

CARTER Damn, I wish you were. I'm not looking for converts, I just wish she had something nice in her life.

DANA Well, I'm not it, I'm afraid. I'd like to be. Something. Anything. Lovers, friends. Something with a future.

CARTER So what's the problem?

DANA If I knew that . . . I don't think it's going to last.

CARTER Don't you believe in "forever."

DANA I try to. Do you?

CARTER I try not to.

DANA One of the things I hated about marriage was the moving. Every time I had a friend, every time we'd gone beyond small talk, "Guess what, hon. I've been transferred." Saying good-bye was like dying.

CARTER I know what you mean.

DANA Sometimes I was so frustrated, I almost thought IBM was conspiring with my husband to keep me friendless.

CARTER Your husband works for IBM?

DANA Plugged right in.

CARTER God, that's pathetic.

DANA Not as pathetic as this. We have good times, easy times. Then suddenly she'll do or say something . . . That dying feeling comes over me again. (Pause) I don't like Parker's Cove. The streets are too clean. But I'd stay, for her. (Laughs) Listen to me, a 35-year-old mother of three, feeling — and probably acting — like a love-sick teenager.

CARTER Maybe it's a little weird for the old Rabbit, her first time and all.

DANA That isn't it.

CARTER I think she loves you.

DANA I know you mean well, but don't comfort me with lies.

CARTER Wow, I haven't seen a depression like this since I woke up in jail with double vision. Try my ladder. It changes your perspective.

DANA (Climbs up a few steps) You have bats in your flood light.

CARTER Well, that makes my day. Want to go downtown and beat up a few bigots?

DANA No, thanks.

CARTER Drink?

DANA No.

CARTER You won't drink my bourbon. You don't want to beat up bigots. Isn't there any way to cheer you up?

DANA Get your sister on the Monhegan Island Ferry.

CARTER Hey, no problem. I'll make life so miserable for her she'll race you to the dock. (Dana laughs) Want an apricot? If you're dieting, we can split one.

DANA They have pit-burn.

CARTER Pit-who?

DANA Pit-burn. They're perfect on the outside, but rotten on the inside.

CARTER Is that a metaphor?

DANA It's a disease.

CARTER What's going on around here? Last year everything was normal. Now all of a sudden Mom takes up sewing, my sister may or may not be getting involved with a woman, and the apricots have a metaphor.

DANA Don't look at me. I'm new in town.

CARTER "Bizarre behavior sweeps quiet village. Mysterious stranger suspected." (Takes Dana's picture) "Is this woman Satan's daughter?"

DANA Carter . . .

CARTER "Unknown photojournalist uncovers cult of evil. Wins Pulitzer Prize."

DANA (Laughing) Cut it out, will you?

CARTER You're in luck. I'm out of film.

DANA You're impossible.

CARTER Yeah, they used to call me "The Holy Terror." Didn't Julie tell you?

DANA No. She talks about you with affection.

CARTER You're kidding.

DANA She likes you.

CARTER She has to like me, I'm her sister.

DANA No, she *likes* you.

CARTER I don't know what to do with that.

- DANA Well, don't tell her I told you. I'm in enough trouble. Carter, help me.
- CARTER Me?
- DANA You know her better than I do.
- CARTER I hardly know her at all. We were the kind of sisters that draw a line down the middle of the bedroom floor. I've never thought about her. Well, I've thought about her, but I've never *thought* about her. To me she's just . . . Julie.
- DANA You must be able to think of some . . . (Stops herself) My God, I'm self-centered. Maybe she wants me to leave her alone.
- CARTER If that were true, she wouldn't keep it a secret.
- DANA We're talking about messing up a lot of lives here.
- CARTER It happens.
- DANA I'll bet there's a name for people like me. I'll bet it isn't very nice.
- CARTER Hey, don't get delusions of grandeur.
- DANA Consequences. There are *consequences*.
- CARTER Sure.
- DANA I should have stayed in New York.
- CARTER For God's sake, Dana, make up your mind.
- DANA I wish I knew what was right.
- CARTER Well, people who know what's *right* scare me. Do what moves you, and rationalize in retrospect. Everyone else does.
- DANA I told her she was fucked up.
- CARTER Jesus, I'd never have that kind of courage.
- DANA Is that *love*?
- CARTER Dana . . .
- DANA Calling someone fucked up. Is that *love*, Carter? Is it?
- CARTER Well, it's no Valentine, but it has a certain poetic clarity.
- DANA I don't need poetic clarity.
- CARTER You think too much.
- DANA I need . . .
- CARTER I *know* what you need. Look, take it from an outside observer. You're the best thing that ever happened to Julie.
- DANA Not if I screw up her life.
- CARTER Her life's screwed up now. We're on the verge of green tomato relish.
- DANA I'm not helping.

CARTER Jesus, I hate guilt. The only people who never feel guilty are the ones who should.

DANA Is it always this hard?

CARTER Life?

DANA Love.

CARTER If they ever make a TV movie about it, they'd better provide a toll-free hot line. May not be suitable for family viewing.

RUTH (Offstage) Carter!

CARTER Yes, Ma'am.

RUTH Your floodlight's drawing bats.

CARTER I'm photographing them. (To Dana) Living next door to Ruth Bessey's like living next door to God. (Touches Dana's shoulder) Take it easy on yourself, okay? There are a lot of tomorrows. (Dana touches Carter's hand. Carter calls) Hey, Julie, quit wasting water. You've got company.

JULIE (Offstage) In a minute.

CARTER (Calls) If you don't want her, I'll take her.

DANA For heaven's sake, Carter.

CARTER Say that again.

DANA What?

CARTER My name.

DANA Carter.

CARTER Oh, my God, I'm in love. (Calls) Better hurry.

DANA Idiot. May I look through that? (Camera)

CARTER Be my guest.

(Dana sights through view finder as Julie enters, sees Dana with camera)

JULIE It's contagious.

DANA Hi.

JULIE Welcome back.

CARTER Scared you, huh?

JULIE No, you didn't scare me. I trust you.

CARTER Damn.

JULIE (To Dana) Has she been giving you a rough time?

DANA We're getting the hang of it. Look, I'm sorry.

JULIE So am I. (To Carter) Carter . . .

CARTER Don't waste your breath. We'll be fighting again in ten minutes.

JULIE Not if I can help it.

CARTER You can't help it.

JULIE (To Dana) How far did you get this time?

DANA Four blocks, a new record. Someday I'll make it all the way home.

JULIE Then what?

DANA Knowing me, I'll turn around and come back.

CARTER I wouldn't wander the streets if I were you. Around here, we think anyone from New York has no morals. (A pause) Will you two get on with it?

JULIE With what?

CARTER Kiss and make up, or whatever one does at your level of involvement.

DANA (To Julie) If we give her a quarter, do you think she'd go to the movies?

CARTER Don't mind me. I have work to do. (Goes off to a corner and unloads her camera)

JULIE I really don't think I can talk about it anymore right now.

DANA Neither can I.

JULIE Are you working tomorrow?

DANA "Daddy's" coming to pick up the kids. Last big treat before school.

JULIE I forgot.

DANA Lucky you. I spend weeks sorting it all out, and in ten minutes he has me feeling like dead oatmeal. An hour before he gets here, Jenny will fall over the dog and bang her head. He'll probably go back to court for custody. Jenny. Why did I name her Jenny? I don't even like it.

JULIE What time is he coming?

DANA Around noon.

JULIE Maybe I'll just happen to drop in at 11:30.

DANA You sure you want to do that?

JULIE Why wouldn't I?

DANA We're having problems, remember?

JULIE Dana, whatever happens, I don't want us to end up ducking down supermarket aisles to avoid each other.

DANA Neither do I. I have to go. My sitter charges by the minute.

JULIE Mine charges by the trauma. I really am sorry.

DANA I know. Julie, please think about . . .

JULIE I *do* think about it. I hardly think about anything else, Dana. How long will it be before you give up on me?

DANA Who knows? I haven't been in control of my life since the day I met you.
(Dana exits. Julie looks after her)

CARTER Don't be a fool. Go to the island. (Silence) Hey, I was scared, too, the first time. Sometimes I still am. It comes with the territory. (Silence) If you're worried about a scandal, bring Mom and Dana and all the kids to Chicago. We'll open a Day Care Center.

JULIE Carter, what's wrong with me?

CARTER I'm out of ideas.

JULIE I can't feel anything for her.

CARTER Could have fooled me.

JULIE Moments. I can't keep it going. I can't feel anything for Ethan. I can't feel anything for the children. Love's just a word I throw around.

CARTER (Tossing her the pills) Maybe it's these little mothers.

JULIE They help me live with it.

CARTER Yeah, well, that makes me mildly psychotic. You're thirty years old, Jem. You could live to eighty. Do you know what fifty years of that stuff can do to your brain?

JULIE I know.

CARTER Maybe you should get out of here. Make a fresh start. Living your whole life in one town, it gives me the creeps.

JULIE I've thought of it.

CARTER Yeah?

JULIE I need Parker's Cove. I need to walk down the street and pass my old grade school. I need to recognize the sound of the wind, and the ocean. I need to know the names of the dogs. I wouldn't know who I was out there.

CARTER Then give up the pills. Please?

JULIE I've tried. But I wake up in the morning, and the sun's lying too bright across the bed . . . I can't face the sun, Carter.

CARTER I never thought it would be like this, did you?

JULIE What?

CARTER Growing up.

JULIE No.

CARTER When we were kids, I used to sneak out here after everyone was asleep. I'd lie in the grass and listen to the night, and watch the stars winking through the tops of the trees. And just before dawn there'd be a stillness, as if the earth were waiting, as if something were about to happen. Something wonderful, something magic. Then a little breeze would come up, and the leaves, touching each other, would make a sound like rain. (Quietly) Oh, God, where did it go?

JULIE Carter . . .

CARTER It damages you to grow up. (Pause) Gail left me.

JULIE No.

CARTER Three weeks ago.

JULIE Why? (Silence) After all this time, why?

CARTER Because . . . I couldn't let her love me.

JULIE You let her go?

CARTER I had to. It was true. One winter I got the flu. I thought I was going to die. I didn't know anything could hurt like that. She had to feed me, and wash me . . . When she left, she said the only time I let her take care of me was when I couldn't help it. (Pause) It wasn't her fault.

JULIE I wish you'd called me. (Carter shrugs) Is that why you got into that fight?

CARTER The fight was before. It's been a memorable summer.

JULIE I'm sorry I climbed on you about that. When I don't know what's happening inside you, my imagination runs wild.

CARTER You're not alone.

JULIE I really would like to understand.

CARTER Last spring I did a series on the Holocaust. I went to the old concentration camps . . .

JULIE I didn't know that.

CARTER Well, it wasn't the kind of thing you send postcards of. "Having a wonderful time, wish you were . . ." (Pause) They have tour guides. Kids run through the halls, playing Jews and Nazis . . . It was the faces, the faces in the old photographs. (Pause) I knew the faces. (Pause) They put people like me in those camps. You know what started it?

JULIE No.

CARTER Meanness. Simple human meanness. All summer they tracked me down in my sleep. When I didn't sleep, couldn't sleep, they were in my mind, in the shadows, waiting . . .

JULIE Carter . . .

CARTER So when that guy came at me, with his Bible and his blue business suit . . . it was a hundred degrees and he was wearing a tie . . . and a gold cross in his lapel. We looked at each other. He smiled, like he knew, and I knew . . . I knew this is how it starts. First the stinking bars, then the camps. (Pause) I wish I'd killed him. (Pause) It's going to happen again, isn't it?

JULIE I don't know.

CARTER I'm running scared. (Julie reaches out to touch her. Carter slips away) Hey, this is America, right? It can't happen here. Not in the land of the free and the home of the self-righteous.

JULIE How could she leave you, knowing . . .

CARTER She didn't know. I didn't want her to be afraid.

JULIE For God's sake, what is she to you? Furniture?

CARTER She was everything gentle in my life. (Pause. In a low voice) Jem, make me cry.

JULIE What?

CARTER I wake in the morning and listen for her. I'll be working in the dark-room and come up with something I want to show her, and I'm halfway upstairs before I remember . . . The plants are dying. She always took care of the plants. I don't know what to do for the plants, and they're dying.

JULIE Carter . . .

CARTER It's all stuffed up inside me, and I can't cry. It hurts, Julie. For God's sake, make me cry.

KETTY (Offstage) Ruth!

RUTH What?

KETTY Want to go to the drive-in?

RUTH I do not.

KETTY It's a trashy movie.

RUTH No.

KETTY I'll pay.

RUTH We're not going anywhere until you do something about your girls.

KETTY What's wrong with my girls?

RUTH One's on drugs, and the other's up a tree.

CARTER (Under her breath) Here it comes.

KETTY (Entering) Now what is it?

CARTER (Quickly) After thirty years of eavesdropping, Ruth's finally blown her circuits.

JULIE Don't, Carter.

KETTY I asked you not to argue.

CARTER We're not arguing.

KETTY I might as well talk to the walls.

JULIE Mom, we're not arguing.

KETTY I've heard enough angry words around this house to last me the rest of my life.

JULIE Mom. (*Has Ketty's attention*) Gail and Carter broke up.

KETTY Oh, Julie, don't be melodramatic.

CARTER Yeah, don't be melodramatic.

JULIE *They broke up.* (*To Carter*) Damn it, tell her.

CARTER (*Offhand*) We broke up.

KETTY Everybody has difficulties.

JULIE It's serious.

CARTER It happens every day. Right now, at this very minute, couples all over the world are breaking up.

JULIE Tell her what happened.

CARTER Rome, Moscow. Probably not Australia. It's winter in Australia.

JULIE *Tell her, Carter.*

CARTER We had issues. Around avocados. She grew them from pits in plastic bags on the bathroom shelf. Try facing naked avocado pits first thing every morning.

JULIE *That's* what happened. Her lover walked out, and all she can do is make sick jokes about avocados.

CARTER Hey, easy come, easy go.

JULIE She's always been like that, and you know why.

KETTY Everyone handles things their own way.

JULIE She isn't handling it.

CARTER I'm handling it.

JULIE Don't let her do it, Mom. *Please.*

KETTY I don't know what you expect me to do.

JULIE Don't give me this.

KETTY You always expect me to do something.

JULIE You never do *anything*. Not where Carter's concerned.

KETTY Am I God?

JULIE Was *he*? *He* did this.

CARTER Look, folks, if it's all the same to you . . .

KETTY The man's dead, Julie. Let him rest.

JULIE He's dead, so all debts are cancelled, right?

CARTER . . . let's talk about something more cheerful.

KETTY What's done is done. He can't take it back.

JULIE He *wouldn't* take it back. He never had a minute of remorse.

KETTY Your father was a generous, hard-working man. Ask anyone in this town.

JULIE That isn't the point.

KETTY The men from the mill told me he was the best foreman they ever had. They told me that.

JULIE You know what I'm talking about, Mom.

KETTY He had a quick temper. Lots of people have a quick temper. Carter has . . .

JULIE Carter has a temper. *He* was a sadist.

CARTER Hey, who says I have a temper?

KETTY Sometimes he got angry, but when it was over it was over. *You* carry it around.

JULIE Mom . . .

KETTY Every time his name comes up, you get in a mood.

JULIE And you send out a smoke screen. Some ugly things went on in this house, and Carter's paying for it.

KETTY Whatever happened between them is none of your business.

CARTER You tell her, Mom.

KETTY There's nothing wrong with Carter.

JULIE There's a great deal wrong with Carter.

KETTY She's doing fine. (To Carter) Aren't you?

CARTER Sure.

JULIE She isn't fine.

CARTER Well, I think we should all calm down.

JULIE (To Carter) You're still drinking his lousy bourbon.

CARTER Yeah, I am. So what?

JULIE You hate the stuff.

CARTER It's not the greatest.

JULIE Then why are you drinking it? (Carter shrugs) There are five more bottles in the house. Are you going to drink that, too?

CARTER Not all at once.

JULIE He's *dead*.

KETTY We all know that, Julie.

JULIE (To Carter) Go ahead, drink his bourbon, make your jokes. But when your next lover leaves you, don't ask me to help you cry.

CARTER Dirty pool, Jem.

JULIE Mom, *help* her.

CARTER She hates bourbon.

KETTY If Carter wants my help, she'll ask for it.

JULIE No, she won't. (To Carter) Will you?

(Carter shrugs)

KETTY What do you expect me to do? (To Carter) What do you want me to do?

CARTER Nothing, Mom. Everything's okay.

JULIE Everything's *not* okay. She doesn't know how to break. Sometimes you have to break! (Pause. Pleading) Mom, for all the times you did nothing, do something now.

KETTY (Explodes) Some day you'll know what it's like, Julie. Some day Ethan will do something so terrible . . . so *wrong* . . . but no matter how *right* you are . . . you can be so *right* all the angels in heaven are on your side. But he's bigger than you, and stronger than you. And there's nothing all your rightness can do against that.

JULIE Why didn't you leave him?

KETTY With two small children? No money of my own. Where was I supposed to go?

JULIE There are places . . .

KETTY "Shelters"? We didn't have shelters back then. Home to Mother? Mother sent you back. Because no matter what went wrong, it was the woman's fault.

JULIE You had friends.

KETTY We kept up appearances. And we didn't call the police. They wouldn't come for a "domestic disturbance." We were victims—not "survivors," or whatever fancy word they use now—*victims*. A lot of us died. We went on living, but we died. We were a generation of walking dead women. But we kept up appearances.

JULIE Mom . . .

KETTY There was only one way to win. Outlive him. And, by God, I managed that. But I couldn't do anything about Carter.

JULIE I'm sorry, Mom.

KETTY From the time she could walk, I was on a high wire. You pushed one way. Ed pushed the other. And Carter . . . do you think I wanted a life like that?

JULIE I don't . . .

KETTY And, my God, the *needing*. "Mom, I hurt my knee." "Carter broke my doll." You're *still* doing it. "Jamie has a fever, Mom. What should I do?" "I can't get the aspic out of the mold, Mom. Can you come over and help?"

CARTER It's okay, Mom.

KETTY Half your clothes are still in this house, Julie. When are you going to grow up?

JULIE I'm sorry.

KETTY Thirty years. Thirty years of doing and giving and fixing. Thirty years of being *needed*. And now this?

JULIE Mom . . .

KETTY My *name* is Katherine Carter Dwyer. Not "Mom," not "the wife," not "hey, you." Katherine Carter Dwyer.

CARTER Yeah, sure, okay.

KETTY I can't help you, Carter. I can't kiss it and make it well. Whatever trouble you're in, you'll have to get yourself out. Because I can't take it anymore. (Exits)

CARTER I like that woman. You okay?

JULIE Yes. Are you?

CARTER Sure. (Goes to her camera case and rummages through it)

JULIE What are you doing?

CARTER Can I get film in this town? Or do they still roll up the sidewalks at dusk?

JULIE Did you hear what she said?

CARTER Yeah, I heard.

JULIE About *him*.

CARTER Marriage is a bitch, isn't it? I may have trouble with Baptists, but at least I can breathe.

JULIE *Carter*.

CARTER Can't get the aspic out of the mold, huh? Shucks, even I can do that.

JULIE Don't.

CARTER It's all a matter of hot water. (Pours herself a drink) Want some of this? You look like you could use it.

JULIE I don't want a drink.

CARTER Right. Better not mix it with that stuff you're on. (Notices her hands are shaking) Looks like I'm a little shaky.

JULIE I know.

CARTER Shouldn't drink on an empty stomach. (Puts her drink down)

JULIE (Shouts) Look at him!

CARTER That's not going to be easy. There are laws, aren't there? Desecrating a grave?

JULIE Stop it.

CARTER Our mother just laid her whole life in front of us. Is that all you can think of?

JULIE At the moment, yes.

CARTER My God, you're single-minded. Must be a character defect.

(Julie hits her)

RUTH (Offstage) What's going on down there?

CARTER Julie's beating me up.

RUTH Should I call the police?

CARTER No, thanks.

JULIE I'm sorry, Carter.

CARTER It's okay. (Sounds of breaking glass from the house) Jesus, this is a violent family. What's she doing? (Realizes, panics) Don't, Mom.

JULIE Let her do it.

CARTER (Starting for the house) Mom!

JULIE (Grabs her) Let her do it. (Carter snatches up the liquor bottle and scurries up the ladder) That one too.

CARTER Stay away from me, Julie.

JULIE Give it to me.

CARTER No.

JULIE We're ending this, now.

CARTER Leave me alone.

JULIE To drink his bourbon? No.

CARTER Go home, Ethan will be worried.

JULIE No more pretending.

CARTER Your children have their faces pressed to the windows . . .

JULIE No more making it nice.

CARTER . . . little eyes riveted to the dark, empty street . . .

JULIE You can't take him down in your darkroom and touch up the blemishes.

CARTER (*Talking fast*) "Small-town mother deserts family. Community scandalized."

JULIE He abused you.

CARTER He loved me.

JULIE That wasn't love.

CARTER He understood . . .

JULIE He understood *nothing*. Tell me one thing he did for you.

CARTER He cared . . .

JULIE One concrete thing. One act of kindness. One tender moment.

CARTER He was proud of me.

JULIE *I'm* proud of you. Mom's proud of you.

CARTER That's different.

JULIE Because he was *male*?

CARTER (*Laughing a little hysterically*) That's really funny, you know that? Wait'll Gail hears . . . (*Breaks off, remembering*)

JULIE Carter . . .

CARTER Teflon brain. Nothing sticks.

JULIE Please, Carter, let me in.

CARTER Why are you doing this?

JULIE Because . . .

CARTER Are you jealous? Are you jealous because he ignored you?

JULIE Every time I see you, I thank God he ignored me.

CARTER Go home.

JULIE Not until you let him go.

CARTER (*Quickly*) "I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me . . ."

JULIE He's *dead*, you don't have to . . .

CARTER ". . . and what can be the use of him is more than I can see."

JULIE . . . be afraid anymore.

CARTER I'm not afraid.

JULIE You're afraid, and you're alone. And you'll be alone until . . .

CARTER He made me strong.

JULIE You were always strong.

CARTER He taught me to fight.

JULIE You came into this world fighting. As soon as you could crawl, you ravished the kitchen. As soon as you could walk, you ran. If anything got in your way, you threatened to blow up the house.

CARTER Leave me alone!

JULIE He *beat* you.

CARTER I *hate* you.

JULIE (Gently) Give me the bottle. He can't hurt you anymore.

CARTER He never hurt me.

JULIE He *hurt* you. And when you cried, he hurt you more.

CARTER No.

JULIE Look at the scars.

CARTER There aren't any scars.

JULIE (Grabs her hand) Look. He did that when you cried over a dead bird you'd found. He lit the burner on the stove and held you there until you stopped crying.

CARTER (Loudly) "Yesterday upon the stair, I saw a man who wasn't there . . ."

JULIE You were eight years old, and he burned you for crying over a dead bird.

CARTER (Loudly) "I saw him there again today. I wish to hell he'd go away."

JULIE He hit you. Over and over.

CARTER To make me fight back.

JULIE He *liked* it. I saw his eyes. He *liked* it.

CARTER Don't do this. Please, don't do this.

JULIE Remember his eyes, Carter. Look at his eyes!

(Carter breaks down, sobbing. Julie takes the liquor bottle, helps her down from the ladder, and holds her. Carter cries, very hard, for a long time)

JULIE (After a while) I wanted to stop him, but I was afraid. I wanted to comfort you . . .

CARTER I waited for you to come.

JULIE But I knew, if I didn't have the courage to fight for you, I didn't have the right to comfort you.

CARTER I thought you didn't care.

JULIE Please forgive me for that. I watched you get tougher and tougher, all the softness in you die.

CARTER When you married Ethan, after all our plans . . .

JULIE Carter . . .

CARTER I thought he was right.

JULIE You mean I did this?

CARTER How could you? You didn't know. Got a handkerchief or something?
(Julie gives her a tissue. Carter wipes away the ravages)

CARTER (Looks down at her hands) He really was a bastard, wasn't he?
(Julie kisses her. It isn't a sisterly kiss)

JULIE (Pulling away) Oh, Jesus.

CARTER Jem . . .

JULIE Don't.

CARTER It's okay. Really.

JULIE No, it isn't. I'm sorry.

CARTER Don't be.

JULIE I won't do it again, I promise.

CARTER Did you mean it?

JULIE Yes.

CARTER (Goes to her) Jem, in a world full of hate, don't be ashamed of love.

JULIE You won't tell anyone?

CARTER Shucks, I was about to call a press conference. Who said small town life was dull?

JULIE It isn't funny.

CARTER Come on, lighten up.

JULIE I need time, to know it's all right.

CARTER It's all right.

JULIE With me.

CARTER I love you, you love me, you kissed me. That's all it is. I hope.

JULIE What do you mean?

CARTER If you go around kissing people you don't love . . . that's pretty weird.

JULIE Carter . . .

CARTER Hey, if it'll make you feel better to sit here and discuss it, we'll sit here and discuss it. (Julie doesn't speak. Wistfully) Guess this means no more holding, huh?

JULIE (Embraces her. Carter holds on tight) What's all this about?

CARTER Twenty-eight years of accumulated affection. (Sighs) I wish you weren't my sister.

JULIE Why?

CARTER Because you swore off incest.

JULIE You're impossible, you know that?

CARTER It's been rumored. Do you think this stuff's addictive?

JULIE Probably.

CARTER I should try it with Gail. She has great breasts, too.

JULIE Honest to God, Carter.

CARTER Not as great as yours, of course. But great.

JULIE What do you suppose Ruth Bessey's thinking?

CARTER Won't be the first time she's heard the Dwyers talking dirty.

JULIE (Moving away) Carter, is it all right with you if I . . . if Dana and I . . .

CARTER You want my permission?

JULIE In a way.

CARTER Jesus, you're complicated.

JULIE Please, it's important.

CARTER You want my blessing? You have my blessing.

JULIE Thank you.

CARTER Of course, it might make you go blind. Your hair might fall out. It might cause pimples, or the heartbreak of psoriasis. Still, some of us have managed to lead socially useful lives.

JULIE You don't understand any of this, do you?

CARTER Sure, I do. No, I don't. Do something for me?

JULIE As Ethan would say, "You got it."

CARTER He doesn't.

JULIE He does.

CARTER Divorce him. (Seriously) Give me the pills. (Takes out her roll of film) I'll trade you. You, Mom, Dana, all of Parker's Fucking Cove for that bottle.

JULIE For yourself?

CARTER Never touch the stuff.

JULIE I could get more.

CARTER And ruin all this terrific symbolism?

(They trade)

JULIE Do you know what time it is?

CARTER About ten, I guess.

JULIE I'd better go.

CARTER Dana turn in early?

JULIE As a matter of fact, yes.

CARTER I'm lucky. It's only nine in Chicago.

KETTY (*Offstage*) Ruth!

RUTH What?

KETTY We can still make the second show at the drive-in. I'll treat.

RUTH Might as well.

KETTY Your car or mine?

RUTH Mine. You drive like a bat out of hell.

CARTER We have more privacy in our high-rise.

JULIE What are your plans?

CARTER Make a phone call, catch a few hours' sleep, head back.

JULIE If things don't work out, you can always come home. If Mom can't handle you, I can.

CARTER Brother. Next time the aspic gets stuck, you know where to find me.
Give Katherine Carter Dwyer a break.

JULIE Carter? I'm scared.

CARTER Yeah, well, as your kid sister would say, it comes with the territory.

JULIE I don't know where it's going to lead.

CARTER Look, maybe you'll be friends, maybe you'll be lovers. Maybe it'll be the biggest scandal ever to make the front page of the National Enquirer. But it's your life, Jem. Sooner or later, you have to risk it.

JULIE Will you stand by me?

CARTER Dumb question. Really dumb question.

JULIE I love you.

CARTER Me, too. Guess the apricots will have to rot on the tree.

JULIE They have pit-burn.

CARTER Yeah. Still and all, they do look pretty in the moonlight.

(Blackout)

THE END

Author's Afterword

8 x 10 GLOSSY began as a play about exile. I intended to explore the problem of a woman who wants to "come home" to the small town she grew up in, but who finds this impossible because small towns are intolerant of "differentness." But, once I had created Carter and Julie, they had other ideas about what was important to them.

I began working with Carter around the time of our annual Gay Rights March. It was a particularly difficult year for our community, marked by rapes of lesbians, bomb and death threats, attacks on gay men and women. The local paper gleefully printed gay-hating letters to the editor, keeping up a barrage of stereotypes and scripture quotes. Carter expresses my outrage.

I don't remember how Dana and Ketty reached me. They arrived one day and refused to leave. Ruth hung around for a while, then retired to the wings. Other characters dropped by, but they weren't particularly interested in what was going on and left.

None of the characters in this play is based on or derived from anyone I have known. This is unusual for me. My feeling about it is that it "wrote itself," though the friends who endured my physical and emotional absence at the time assure me I worked hard at it.

Perhaps 8 x 10 GLOSSY is one of those "gifts" the Muses give us when we least expect it. Or maybe it's just that writing, like life, becomes easier with practice.

List of Plays

THIS BROODING SKY: A LESBIAN GOTHIC ROMANCE (one act), 1978

BACKWARD, TURN BACKWARD, 1984

BASE CAMP, 1983

HOLLANDIA, 1983

TEN YEARS AFTER, 1985

Editor's Note

In April 1985, just after this anthology's manuscript went to the printer, 8 x 10 GLOSSY was awarded first prize in the first Annual Lesbian Playwriting Contest, sponsored by Theater Rhinoceros, San Francisco, California.

1. The first part of the paper is devoted to a general discussion of the problem of the origin of life. It is shown that the problem is one of the most important and most difficult in the history of science. The author points out that the problem of the origin of life is not only a scientific problem, but also a philosophical and religious one. He argues that the scientific approach to the problem of the origin of life is based on the assumption that life is a result of a series of chemical reactions. This assumption is based on the fact that life is a complex system, and the only way to explain its origin is by assuming that it is the result of a series of chemical reactions. The author then discusses the various theories of the origin of life, including the theory of spontaneous generation, the theory of panspermia, and the theory of abiogenesis. He concludes that the theory of abiogenesis is the most plausible, but that it is still a matter of debate.

2. The second part of the paper is devoted to a detailed discussion of the theory of abiogenesis. The author begins by discussing the various chemical reactions that are thought to have led to the origin of life. He then discusses the various theories of the origin of life, including the theory of spontaneous generation, the theory of panspermia, and the theory of abiogenesis. He concludes that the theory of abiogenesis is the most plausible, but that it is still a matter of debate.

3. The third part of the paper is devoted to a discussion of the philosophical and religious aspects of the problem of the origin of life. The author argues that the scientific approach to the problem of the origin of life is based on the assumption that life is a result of a series of chemical reactions. This assumption is based on the fact that life is a complex system, and the only way to explain its origin is by assuming that it is the result of a series of chemical reactions. The author then discusses the various theories of the origin of life, including the theory of spontaneous generation, the theory of panspermia, and the theory of abiogenesis. He concludes that the theory of abiogenesis is the most plausible, but that it is still a matter of debate.

4. The fourth part of the paper is devoted to a discussion of the historical development of the problem of the origin of life. The author begins by discussing the various theories of the origin of life, including the theory of spontaneous generation, the theory of panspermia, and the theory of abiogenesis. He then discusses the various theories of the origin of life, including the theory of spontaneous generation, the theory of panspermia, and the theory of abiogenesis. He concludes that the theory of abiogenesis is the most plausible, but that it is still a matter of debate.

5. The fifth part of the paper is devoted to a discussion of the future of the problem of the origin of life. The author argues that the scientific approach to the problem of the origin of life is based on the assumption that life is a result of a series of chemical reactions. This assumption is based on the fact that life is a complex system, and the only way to explain its origin is by assuming that it is the result of a series of chemical reactions. The author then discusses the various theories of the origin of life, including the theory of spontaneous generation, the theory of panspermia, and the theory of abiogenesis. He concludes that the theory of abiogenesis is the most plausible, but that it is still a matter of debate.

GOING UP

by
Julia Willis

Production History

GOING UP was originally presented as a one-act within an evening of satirical sketches, songs, and monologues by *The Ends and Means Committee* (a comedy trio of women who toured the New England area for three seasons, 1979-1982), with the following cast:

Marie—Julia Willis

Anita—Jennifer Justice

Additional *Committee* member—Libba Ingram

All inquiries concerning *all* rights to this play should be addressed to Julia Willis, c/o Willis/Carrick, 905 Carter Drive, Shelby, North Carolina 28150.

Author's Notes

There is an elevator onstage, but no one will have to go to the trouble of building it. Available lighting should define its contours, and the characters inside it will do the rest. Creating this illusion is less a matter of mime than it is a matter of conviction on the part of the actors—they must see and work within *exactly* the same space. At the end of the play, Anita may turn her back to represent the elevator doors closing—shutting out Marie. Costuming is conventional—Anita dresses small-town stylish, Marie is an urban eccentric. Stage directions that are not helpful should be totally ignored. What I would most like to suggest is that you try to discover the precise moment at which the characters (however briefly) fall in love.

Editor's Notes

GOING UP is a people-watcher's play. We people are fragile and very strange creatures, and this play likes people.

It is a study in human foibles; a study in the hazardous and, in this play, often hilarious results of assumptions and ignorance. To me, this play is also about the pursuit of: integrity, mutual respect, intimacy-and-distance. It is also about self-esteem — marked by a sense of personal power — which has nothing to do with controlling others.

All this from a really funny one-act play.

GOING UP is also an actor's play. It is very theatrical, and requires a heightened, open expression of human behavior. The actors must not only establish the physical reality of the elevator, they also must achieve a rapid-fire pacing — *which has nothing to do with quick line delivery* — based in continuous emotional gearshifts and careful, mutually alert timing.

Also, to achieve the highest possible hilarity, it is imperative that the actors totally believe in Marie and Anita's situation and respond only to its reality. The actors must *not* ever know, even for an instant, that the audience finds anything funny.

P.S. Informants tell me that when the author played Marie, her costume included a high school marching band jacket. When Julia says "urban eccentric," she means urban eccentric! Actually, though her views and feelings are couched in humor, I think she means everything she says, and cares about how she says it.

GOING UP

CHARACTERS: A woman in the elevator named Marie; Anita.

SCENE: The elevator doors open. A woman named Marie is standing in the elevator. Anita gets on.

ANITA (Calling over her shoulder) All right, I'll meet you downstairs in just a minute. (To Marie) Nine, please.

(The elevator doors close, as Marie pushes nine)

ANITA Oh, I'm sorry.

MARIE Why?

ANITA I thought you were working here.

MARIE (Smiling) No.

ANITA Did you push nine?

MARIE Yes.

ANITA Thank you.

MARIE You're welcome.

(Silence. The elevator stops)

ANITA What was that?

MARIE We've stopped.

ANITA We're not moving.

MARIE Wait a minute.

(Marie pushes a button. Nothing happens. She tries again. Still nothing. She looks up at the floor indicator)

ANITA What's the matter?

MARIE I think we're stuck between floors.

ANITA Oh no.

MARIE It's all right.

ANITA Will we be able to breathe?

MARIE Oh sure. And it won't fall or anything.

ANITA No?

MARIE I've been stuck in an elevator before. Haven't you?

ANITA No, I never have.

MARIE (Looking) I'll just ring the alarm and somebody will come — there doesn't seem to be one of those switches — oh no, here. (Presses a button)
Do you hear anything?

ANITA No — should I?

MARIE Maybe not. Maybe they can hear it somewhere else.

ANITA Or maybe it doesn't work.

MARIE Oh, they'll know we're here.

ANITA How long does it take?

MARIE To know we're here?

ANITA To get out.

MARIE Oh, a little while.

ANITA A few minutes.

MARIE At least. Maybe an hour or so.

ANITA I'll be late for dinner.

MARIE I think I've got an apple in my pocket.

ANITA Oh no, I'm not hungry.

MARIE Well, we should just sit down and relax, we'll be out soon.

ANITA Sit on the floor?

MARIE I think I'll sit down (Sits) It's more comfortable.

ANITA You're not wearing white, though —

MARIE (Putting down her coat) Here, you can sit on my coat.

ANITA Oh no — well, all right — thank you. (Squats down on coat)

MARIE I'm Marie.

ANITA Anita.

MARIE Hi.

ANITA I'm afraid this is making me a little nervous.

MARIE Are you feeling claustrophobic?

ANITA No, no — just a little nervous. It's hard for me to catch my breath.

MARIE There's plenty of air.

ANITA But how long will it last?

MARIE There's a vent up there, see? It won't run out.

ANITA Oh. Yes.

MARIE Don't worry. (Touches Anita's shoulder)

ANITA (Off-balance, sitting hard on coat) Oh! No, I won't worry.

MARIE I wish we had a book to read aloud. When I was stuck in an elevator once, a friend of mine read from Amelia Earhart's autobiography.

ANITA Who? Amelia Earhart?

MARIE Amelia Earhart.

ANITA Isn't she dead?

MARIE This was just a book she wrote.

ANITA Oh, she wasn't on the elevator?

MARIE No. Just her book.

ANITA Do you have it?

MARIE No, I don't *have* a book—I was saying I wished I did.

ANITA I should be downstairs by now. My husband's waiting for me. And my friends. My children are waiting on the fourth floor. Isn't there some way to call them?

MARIE No, the best thing to do is just relax. They'll wait on you.

ANITA Uh-huh.

MARIE Being stuck in an elevator is a great excuse for anything—you just can't help it. (Laughs) It's an act of God.

ANITA Why did you say that?

MARIE Oh—just kidding. Look, we're fine. You know, I was thinking, we must be stuck but the power is still on—and that's good.

ANITA Is it?

MARIE Sure—the light's on.

ANITA You mean it might go off?

MARIE No, I wasn't saying—

ANITA I don't think I could stand that.

MARIE The light is on—it will stay on.

ANITA Are you sure.

MARIE Sure.

ANITA Positive?

MARIE Not *positive*—

ANITA No?

MARIE I think the light will stay on, and I hope we'll be out of here very soon.

ANITA So do I.

MARIE Why don't you think of something else?

ANITA All right. (Pause) Are you married?

MARIE No.

MARIE Oh — divorced.

MARIE No — I've never been married.

ANITA And no children?

MARIE (Laughs) No.

ANITA Oh, I'm sorry. That sounds awful. I don't know what I'm saying —

MARIE That's all right.

ANITA I'm married, and I have three children.

MARIE Ah — yes.

ANITA They're probably very worried about me — why aren't you married?

MARIE Why should I be?

ANITA Don't you believe in marriage?

MARIE Not for me.

ANITA I'm sorry — am I being too personal?

MARIE No.

ANITA Don't you like men? (Marie laughs) I'm sorry — is that too personal?

MARIE Well, I'm not sure how you mean it.

ANITA Oh. Never mind.

MARIE Now I'm sure how you mean it.

ANITA I just wonder why some people never marry.

MARIE Because they look after their widowed mothers, or they're gay (Anita stifles a gasp) or they're too busy or they're too happy — I think there are as many reasons as there are people. The same for people who *do* marry.

ANITA Well, I'm married. And I have three children.

MARIE Yes. You told me.

ANITA I did, yes. I wanted to marry, when the right man came along. Maybe you just haven't met the right man.

MARIE (Laughs) Maybe so.

ANITA Why are you laughing?

MARIE Oh — I think you're just used to married people.

ANITA Well, I *am* married.

MARIE Well — I'm not.

ANITA Why?

MARIE Well—I'm gay.

ANITA Oh.

MARIE Did you guess?

ANITA No—I didn't mean to get personal.

MARIE It's all right.

ANITA I'm very sorry.

MARIE But I don't want you to get the wrong idea. People who don't believe in marriage still believe in love, you know.

ANITA Please don't say things like that to me.

MARIE What?

ANITA Is that light flickering?

MARIE No.

ANITA Did you hear anything? Are we moving?

MARIE No, I don't think so.

ANITA I'm feeling lightheaded—

MARIE Take a deep breath.

ANITA Can you breathe?

MARIE Put your head between your legs.

ANITA (Shocked) WHY?

MARIE If you feel faint, you do that.

ANITA Oh, yes, that's right. But I can't—

(Anita puts her head down for a moment, then looks up, then down again—she is afraid to take her eyes off Marie long enough to keep her head down)

MARIE Just keep your head down, and breathe.

ANITA Why don't they do something?

MARIE They will—I mean, they are.

ANITA I can't catch my breath.

MARIE Yes, you can—here, keep your head down and—

ANITA Don't touch me.

MARIE Okay—but you need to relax—watch me, I'm going to lie here and breathe— (Leans back) —see? And I'll think about something nice.

ANITA I'm going to sue this hotel.

MARIE That's a nice thought. How much will you sue for?

ANITA What?

MARIE How much money will you sue them for?

ANITA A million dollars.

MARIE Oh, that'll be fun.

ANITA Two million dollars.

MARIE I think a million would be enough.

ANITA I could be having a heart attack—

MARIE Oh, don't say that—what will you buy with a million dollars?

ANITA Buy? I don't know—

MARIE You could travel.

ANITA I don't like to travel.

MARIE Are you on vacation?

ANITA Yes—a vacation, and a convention. My husband's here for that—and we brought the children—

MARIE What sort of convention is it?

ANITA I have three children.

MARIE I know, you told me.

ANITA I'm a mother.

MARIE I know.

ANITA Oh—you—

MARIE What?

ANITA You won't attack me, will you?

MARIE Oh my God.

ANITA We could be moving any minute.

MARIE Listen—I don't even know you. And I'm not sure that I want to.

ANITA Then you won't?

MARIE I am really insulted by what you're saying to me.

ANITA But I didn't know—and I'm so upset—

MARIE You don't know what you're talking about—

ANITA But you like women—

MARIE No I don't.

ANITA But I thought you said—

MARIE Maybe your husband *likes* women—I *love* women. And I happen to be somewhat discriminating as to *who* I love.

ANITA I don't understand.

MARIE I wouldn't touch you with a ten-foot pole. Now just leave me alone.
I'm going to try to relax and ignore this whole ridiculous situation.

ANITA (After a pause) My heart is beating too fast.

MARIE You take care of it—it's your heart.

ANITA My husband loves me.

MARIE Goody for you.

ANITA Nothing like this has ever happened to me before.

MARIE Oh, for Christ's sake—we're just stuck on an elevator—it's not the end of the world.

ANITA I know, but I feel—I feel so alone.

MARIE Well, excuse me while I crawl through the ceiling and disappear.

ANITA No, I didn't mean—

MARIE Oh yes you did. If I weren't here you could have had a perfectly marvelous time hyperventilating all by yourself.

ANITA That's not true.

MARIE I've just made you worse.

ANITA No—I'm really glad someone's with me.

MARIE But you would prefer someone else.

ANITA I don't know, I guess so, but—

MARIE Would you rather be stuck in here with your husband?

ANITA Well, no, I don't think so. He'd be awfully mad.

MARIE Your children?

ANITA No, that would be terrible. I'd—I'd worry about them.

MARIE Who, then?

ANITA I'd like—I'd like my mother.

MARIE Me too.

ANITA Maybe not my mother now, she's in poor health, but my mother then, when I cut my finger or something—

MARIE Why don't you just pretend I'm your mother?

ANITA Wouldn't you be more like my father?

MARIE No. Not at all.

ANITA Oh.

MARIE A misconception.

ANITA Oh.

MARIE I'll be your aunt.

ANITA Aunt Louise?

MARIE Okay.

ANITA She never married.

MARIE Perfect.

ANITA I just don't understand you.

MARIE You couldn't understand me without knowing me.

ANITA I don't understand.

MARIE I think I can understand you. You're — right here, and you're — stuck in this elevator —

ANITA Well, so are you.

MARIE That's true.

ANITA I don't know about you, but I don't think I'll ever ride in an elevator again. In my whole life.

MARIE (Beginning to laugh) Stairs are good exercise.

ANITA (Also beginning to laugh) I don't care if I never *see* another elevator.

MARIE In your whole life.

ANITA Not in my whole life.

MARIE You'll sue.

ANITA For a million dollars. A billion dollars!

MARIE Two billion dollars!

ANITA Two billion dollars!

MARIE You could own this place.

ANITA (Deadpan) But I'll put in more stairs.

(Anita and Marie laugh until they are worn out)

ANITA Well, I'm feeling a little better now, but for a while there I thought I was having a heart attack.

MARIE Have you had one?

ANITA No, but Jack, my sister's husband, had one last year, and I worry that Bill might be next, Bill's my husband —

MARIE You have just the one sister?

ANITA I have two, two sisters and one brother.

MARIE Are you the youngest?

MARIE Yes. Are you?

MARIE I was in the middle.

ANITA Boys or girls?

MARIE Girls. Three girls.

ANITA Are you all—unmarried?

MARIE One of us is married. To a lawyer.

ANITA Do you live here?

MARIE Here in town? Yes.

ANITA Well, what are you doing here?

MARIE Visiting my father.

ANITA (Relieved) Oh. Your father.

MARIE Right. He's an ophthalmologist.

ANITA Oh, he's here for the convention too . . .

MARIE From Miami.

ANITA Miami—oh, we went there, last summer, no—it was two summers ago. It was so hot.

MARIE It is that.

ANITA Well. How is your father?

MARIE I don't know, I haven't seen him. I was unavoidably detained.

ANITA Oh, yes. (Pause) You don't think they've forgotten us.

MARIE No, it's all right.

ANITA Unless the whole world has stopped.

MARIE I don't think so.

ANITA I don't either . . . Do you believe in God?

MARIE Yes.

ANITA I wondered.

MARIE She's all right by me.

ANITA Who?

MARIE God.

ANITA Who?

(The elevator begins to move)

MARIE We're moving.

ANITA Oh, thank God!

MARIE Thank God.

ANITA How do I look? Awful?

MARIE No.

ANITA Oh, I'm a mess—

MARIE (Picking up her coat) It'll only help your case.

ANITA What?

MARIE If you want to sue.

ANITA Oh, no, I don't think so.

MARIE Not even for a million dollars?

ANITA It's too embarrassing.

(The elevator stops)

ANITA Oh no!

(The elevator doors open)

MARIE This is my floor. Seven (Pause) Well. (Holds the door-open button)
Do you want to get out here and go up the stairs?

ANITA (Distantly) No, I'll go on up.

MARIE I'll walk up with you if you'd like—

ANITA No—that's all right. I really don't care for the stairs.

MARIE Okay. Take it easy.

(Marie steps out of the elevator)

ANITA Good-bye.

MARIE (Taking a deep breath) Oh, yes, this is— (She turns, and the elevator
doors have closed)—much better.

(Marie walks off)

END

Author's Afterword

People tend to reveal very intimate aspects of themselves when they are forced to interact with strangers in public places: waiting in the bank line, leafing through heads of lettuce in the produce department, or staring at the floor indicator in a crowded elevator. City people are best at pretending there's no one else there, and because I am not a city person I find such behavior extraordinary. Still, every throat being cleared, every jiggling foot, every push or pleasantry is a wide-open window to someone's soul. Now if we take common interactions to extremes: if the bank is being robbed, if a tornado roars down aisle four in the supermarket, if the elevator stops dead in its tracks, then we have a situation where strangers *have* to admit they're there, together, and that is not only a revealing situation, that is a dramatic situation.

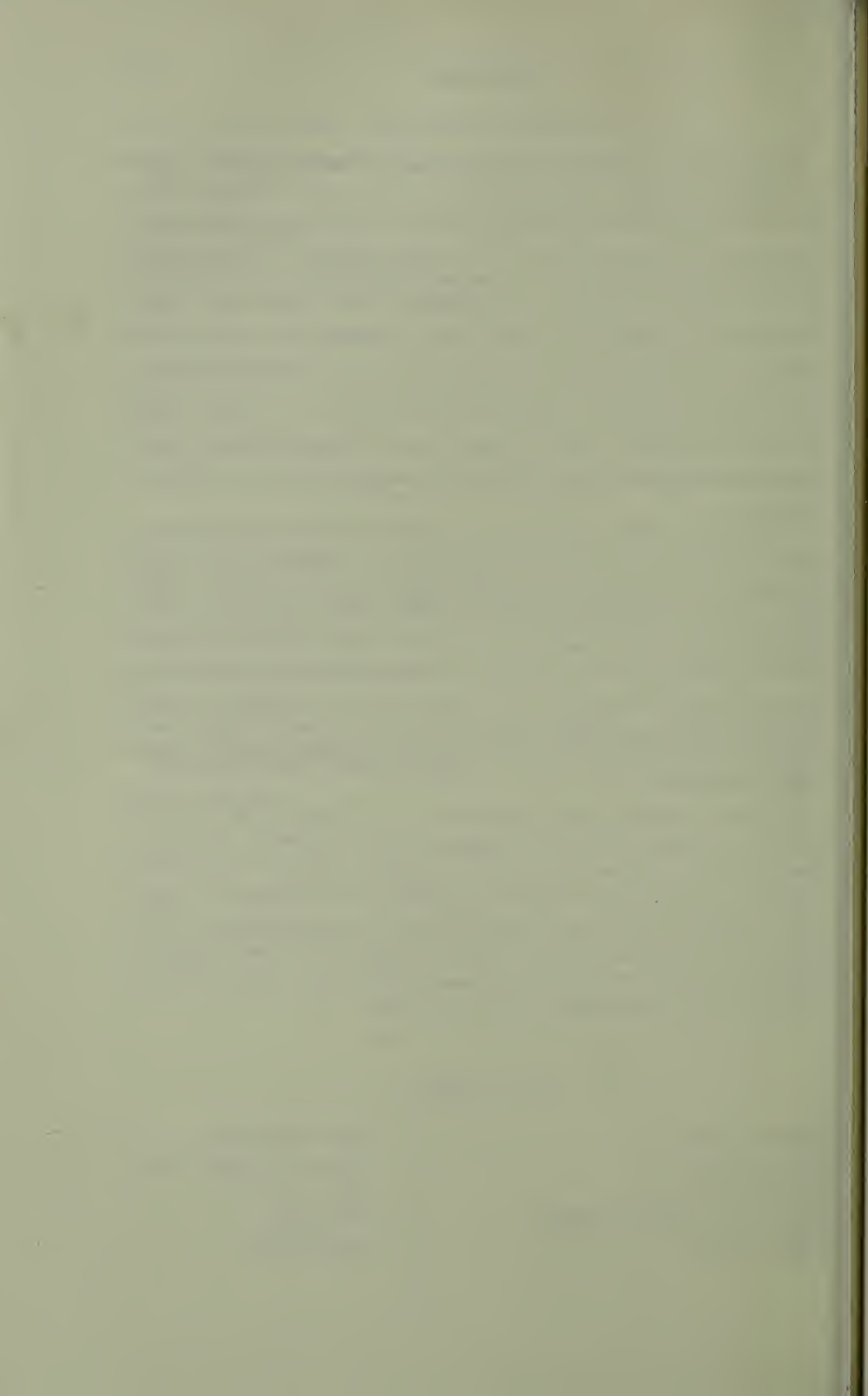
I chose to put Marie and Anita in an elevator (instead of a bank or a supermarket) so that they could be alone, as strangers, and reveal themselves to themselves and each other in a nice secluded public place without any fire exits. And I suppose it goes without saying, but should be said, that unless they had been trapped together, neither Marie nor Anita would have been inclined to exchange more than a few words with one another. The firmly gay and adamantly straight worlds of strangers seldom collide in such an openly human way unless the situation absolutely demands it. So, I chose one that did absolutely demand it.

The only autobiographical inspiration for this play that I recall is the time in college my friend Mandy and I were trapped in the library tower elevator for two hours with a graduate student in math. She was very nervous and bordering on panic till we all began to take turns reading aloud from Amelia Earhart's autobiography, which Mandy had just found in the stacks. Amelia's voice was infinitely reassuring, and to this day I recommend it for those acutely anxious moments that life and elevators have to offer.

List of Plays

SOUP DU JOUR
MAIN COURSES
JUST DESSERTS
FOOD TODAY FOOD TOMORROW
WHO'S THERE?

HAPPY BIRTHDAY
WELCOME TO THE WORLD
THE LAST GUEST
ON TARGET
CAR TROUBLE



IMMEDIATE FAMILY

by
Terry Baum

with Carolyn Myers as Script Consultant

Production History

IMMEDIATE FAMILY was premiered under the title *Death's Angel* on May 20, 1983, at the first National Festival of Women's Theater in Santa Cruz, California. Terry Baum played the part of Virginia. Margo Tufo was the sound and lighting designer, and also created the respirator tape.

In September 1983, the Bear Republic Theater produced IMMEDIATE FAMILY in Santa Cruz, with a month-long run. The play was performed at the National Gay and Lesbian Gerontology Conference in San Francisco in December 1983. In the summer of 1983, Baum toured the Northwest and Midwest with the play. In the spring of 1985, IMMEDIATE FAMILY was performed at the Boston Women's Theater Festival and toured the East Coast. In all these performances, Terry Baum played the part of Virginia.

All inquiries concerning *all* rights should be addressed to Terry Baum, 545 Douglass St., San Francisco, California 94114.

Author's Notes

IMMEDIATE FAMILY is realistic in terms of Virginia's character and the conflicts she faces, and demands a realistic acting style. However, it is abstract in that Rosie in her hospital bed is not represented by any actress or piece of furniture, but simply by the sound track of a respirator. Thus the play demands a setting that is spare enough to allow the actress playing Virginia the room to create Rosie, and their deep relationship, both for herself and for the audience.

A chair and a bedside table such as might be found in a hospital

room are necessary. One flat with a door in it set upstage represents the passage to the outside world. These three objects need to have some kind of visual unity.

The respirator tape must continue without interruption through the play. It should not stop between the two scenes. This demands either a reel-to-reel tape recorder or a dual cassette deck. If two cassette tapes are used, the changeover from one to the other can be done at a point when the audience is laughing, so that it won't be noticed.

The tape for the original production was made from a synthesizer, after attempts to tape an actual respirator proved unsuccessful. A nurse later suggested that the best place to get a good tape of a respirator would be a school where respiratory therapy is taught. The synthesizer tape was very effective, though.*

A real official U.S. Post Office uniform can be bought at any big uniform store. The salesman will wonder why you don't have a government voucher to pay for it.

Virginia is 55 years old. She identified as gay in the '50s, when all lesbians were pressured to adopt either "butch" or "femme" mannerisms. Virginia chose to be butch. Maybe she would have been butch even without the pressure. Her walk, her gestures, her hair style are all masculine. Thus, while she has not verbally "come out" to people, her physical presence expresses her homosexuality.

The actress playing Virginia should not be afraid to sit still, to be silent, to take her time. In performing this play I have found that less is definitely more. The part demands an emotional honesty that makes rote repetition impossible. It forced me, as an actress, to continually fall back on myself. It taught me a great deal about acting.

This version was the final version *at the time the anthology was published*. But in performance by the author, this play is continually rewritten and improved. For the final version for production, the playwright should be contacted.

* A copy of the synthesizer tape is available upon request.

Editor's Notes

In the beginning, if there ever was such a time, the Amazons gathered at the evening fires for storytelling. Then on a star-blessed night, one of the most daring—in a company of daring women—stood and

quietly said, "Believe with me! Who I say I am, I am." And choosing an identity not her own—a lark, a goddess, the wind, a companion—she spoke the first monolog and invented theater.

On the surface IMMEDIATE FAMILY is a monolog. But what I like about IMMEDIATE FAMILY is that it isn't a monolog at all. It manages to move to the next level of theater: a dialog between two real human beings.

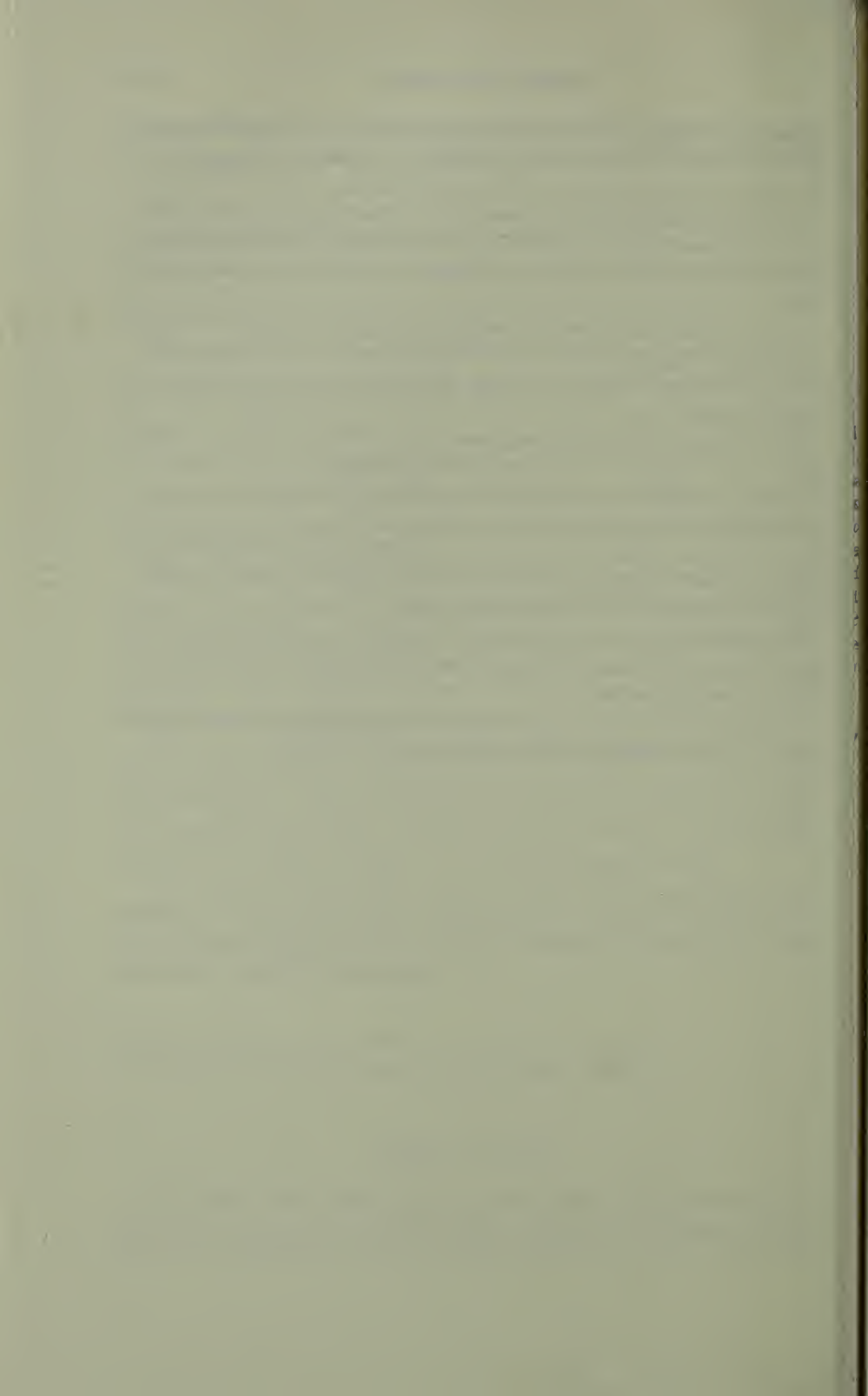
It is incidental that one of the people never speaks aloud. If we listen carefully to Virginia and if we listen carefully to what Virginia is listening to—based on her knowledge and memory of Rose—then we can hear Rose.

This unusually successful treatment of the script's structure sets it apart into a category I cannot name. That pleases me.

Virginia's words reveal so much to us. The events her mind chooses to remember about Rose tell us much about Rose, but even more about Virginia. Virginia's stories about herself, and her recalled conversations with the nurse and the doctor and relatives, round out a believably inconsistent and endearing woman.

This play focuses on connections: the desire to maintain them, the lack of them, the fear of losing them, the puzzle of how to end or change them respectfully.

IMMEDIATE FAMILY is a *tour de force* for actor, director, and audience. It is also a highly polished little jewel of a play.



IMMEDIATE FAMILY

SCENE ONE

(Darkness. The soft pulsing sound of a respirator is heard. This continues throughout the play. The lights slowly fade up on a chair and a nightstand such as might be found in a hospital room. There is a pitcher, filled with water and wilted flowers, and a drinking glass on the nightstand. A wastebasket sits on the floor. Upstage is a door that is half open. There is nothing else. Virginia enters. She is in her middle fifties and is wearing a post office uniform. She is a bulldyke. That is, her manner, walk, and haircut are "masculine" in a stereotypical way. Virginia is carrying a bag of groceries and a bunch of flowers. Several letters stick out of her back pocket. Virginia stops and stares at the space in front of the chair and bedside stand, which is where the hospital bed would be. Virginia talks to the imaginary person lying in this imaginary bed.)

VIRGINIA Hello there, Rosie. How's my girl? Look what I got today! (Waves the flowers in the face of the imaginary person in the bed) Pretty, aren't they? They're called . . . Hell, I can't remember what they're called. Anyhow, they smell good. (Pointing to flowers already in pitcher) Look at those poor things! Wilted already, and I just brought 'em yesterday. I'm tellin' ya, Rosie, this hospital air'll kill anything that breathes. (Virginia throws the old flowers in the wastebasket and arranges new ones in the pitcher) There, that's better.

(Sits down) So, Rose. How's your coma going? I see the old respirator's doing it's thing, bob-bob-bobbing along. How're you feeling, Rosie? (Pause) Are you feeling? (Pause. Virginia sets her bag of groceries down, slumps in chair) Had a hard day at work today, my girl. We got a whole shitload of mail dumped on us. Had to work like hell. And then I spent my entire lunch hour shopping for groceries. You know, they had artichokes for sale today, those great big ones. (She pulls a very large artichoke out of her shopping bag) It was only a dollar ninety-nine! How about that! Pretty good for such a big one. Now Rose, I know you say that's extravagant. But you could eat three or four of those little bitty artichokes, and they don't fill you up like one of these big ones here. I don't care what you say. I think it's a bargain. And I'm gonna have this baby for dinner tonight when I get home from the hospital. Oh, and I got one of these things. (Pulls out a cheap back scratcher. Pause) I don't know why I brought all this stuff in. I guess I thought you might like to look at an artichoke. Pretty silly-looking

vegetable, isn't it? (Throws artichoke back in bag. Searches for a topic of conversation)

Rose, you will never guess what I had for dinner last night, not in a million years. Come on, try! (Pause) Aw, you give up too easy. (Dramatically) Brussel sprouts! Can you believe that? Smelly green golfballs, I used to call 'em. Stunk up the whole house. I just ate 'em because you love 'em. And you say I'm not the romantic type and here I am gobbling up your favorite foods just so's I can . . . I don't know . . . have you inside me somehow.

Oh Rosie, how I've changed. I'm doing all the things you always wanted me to do. I'm tellin' you, if you came home today, we'd never have an argument for the rest of our lives. (Leaning forward) You know, Rose, you were right. It's not so tough to keep the house as neat as a pin. You just can't let it get ahead of you. Once you've let it slide . . . oh, two or three weeks or so, *then* you've got a mess on your hands. But if you attend to it every fifteen or twenty minutes, it's not too bad. I'm tellin' you, Rose, I'm a new woman. House so clean I can eat brussel sprouts off my floor. (Pause)

Rose, did I tell you I talked to the head nurse yesterday? Now listen here, I says to her, I don't get off work until 5:30. By the time I get down here, find a place to park, it's 6 o'clock, 6:15. And then the damn visiting hours are over at 6:45! Do you mind if I stay a little longer, I says to her. Do you know what she said to me? "Well, Miss Sedgeway, are you related to Miss Belbasio in any way by blood?" Now Rose, can you tell me how a Miss Belbasio and Miss Sedgeway can be related by blood? That's the most ridiculous thing I ever heard. So I says no. "Are you related by marriage?" she says. I says to her, I am Miss Belbasio's . . . best friend. "Oh! Just a friend," she says. "Then I'm sorry, Miss Sedgeway. You'll have to adhere to the official visiting hours. Only the immediate family is allowed to come and go as they please. Those are the hospital rules." (Long pause)

Rosie, I gave that woman such HELL! Now listen here Nursie, says I. I *am* Miss Rosa Felicia Belbasio's immediate family. You cannot find anybody more immediate than I am. And the next time you tell me to leave, you'd better get the police in here to carry me away, because I'm staying until I'm damned ready to go. Rose, I damned near punched her lights out! . . . Well, that's not exactly the way it happened. (Pause) Actually, that's not the way it happened at all. You know me, Rose. I did think all those things. I just never got around to saying a single one of them. Big bad Virginia. Oh, I think big, don't I. But when it comes right down to it . . . I don't know . . . I clam up, I get confused. The truth is, I begged her. I said "Please" more than once. She sounded like she was sorry. Ahhh, maybe I shoulda got down on my hands and knees. Begging some stranger to let me see my girl just a little bit longer. I think she was really sorry, Rose. Ah, what the hell. Maybe I shoulda punched her lights out . . . All the times I've talked at punching people's lights out, and I've never done it. Not once. I'm not sure I'd even enjoy punching somebody's lights out. (Awash in self-pity) I'm all bark and no bite. Not too much bark either.

(A flicker of hope) Of course, I did make them switch you to another room, now, didn't I? Oh, they wouldn't believe that your old room was colder than the rest of the hospital, would they? Oh no! I said to them, look at this room. It's a mess. You got two ceiling tiles missing over here

(Points up), and a crack between the wall and the window over there. (Points to where the imaginary window is). This isn't a room. It's a goddam walk-in freezer, says I! Remember what they said to me? "Oh no, Miss Sedgeway. You must be mistaken. Every room is the same temperature. Those are the hospital rules."

I had to bring in my own goddam thermometer from home to prove to them that your room was colder. And it was, wasn't it, Rose? Six whole degrees colder! Oh I tell you, when I shoved that thermometer in the head nurse's face and she promised to switch you to a new room right then . . . that was a great day! . . . Actually, I didn't shove it in her face, Rose. I just kinda showed it to her. But I got your room changed, didn't I? I'm good for something after all, aren't I, Rosie? (Flirtatious) Oh I bet you'd say I was good for lots of things, wouldn't you? (Doubtful pause)

Maybe you wouldn't. I never could predict you. Sometimes I'd feel so close to you and then—bingo—you'd be a million miles away. It used to bother me a hell of a lot. (Softly. Takes Rose's hand) Where are you now, my girl? I'd sure like to know.

Honey, I'm holding your hand now. Can you feel it? Your hand's so cold, thin. Spindly. Used to be a big hand, didn't it Rose? Now, how many times have we put our hands together to see how big yours were compared to mine? Why did we do that? I mean, I can see doing something like that once, just out of curiosity. But we musta done it a hundred times. Funny the things people do when they're spending their whole lives together. (Pause) Comparing hands. (Places Rose's imaginary hand on top of hers) Hey look, you big lunk. Your fingers are still longer than mine. (Puts Rose's hand back where it has been, resting on her lap)

Rosie, do you remember the first time we held hands? Oh, I sure do. We'd known each other a few months, and I was so confused. I mean, I knew you liked me a hell of a lot. But did you know what I was? Were you one too? Were we just good friends? Were we falling in love? What the hell was going on? Finally, I couldn't take it anymore. I decided I had to take action—even if it meant losing you as a friend. (Very dramatic) So I took your hand in mine. (Laughs) I was scared shitless that you'd jump up and run out of that movie theater screaming. But you didn't. You stayed right where you were. And later that night, you kissed me.

I will never forget that moment. Just been kissed by the girl of my dreams . . . and I step in a pile of dogpoop. I thought, that's it for you, Virginia. You have done it this time. How can she possibly love somebody who's so stupid and clumsy? But you just laughed. As a matter of fact, you laughed a lot. Come to think of it, you couldn't stop laughing. You're always laughing at me, aren't you, Rose? You don't take me seriously at all. And here I thought I had found me a girl who would make me a nice little wife. Someone I could talk to without fear of contradiction. (Laughing at herself) Without fear of contradiction. Was I wrong. Some nice little wife you made me . . .

Hey Rosie, did I tell you that everybody at work asks about you? Now that's nice. Makes me feel good. Almost like a normal human being instead of some crazy old dyke. Except Arthur. Now Arthur, he makes a big point of not asking about you. But then, he's always hated queers, hasn't he? He's

the only one left. All the others have come around. You know, the post office isn't such a bad place to work nowadays. Maybe all that gay liberation stuff has done some good.

Now I didn't say for sure. I said *maybe*. And don't you start in about that gay pride parade again. You could have marched in that damn thing all by yourself if you had wanted to. Gay pride, gay pride. I'm gay. Damn it, isn't that enough? Why the hell do I have to be proud of it too? How can you be proud of something that you just *are*? That's like being proud that I have blue eyes. What's the sense in that, I ask you? Well, I'm gay and I have blue eyes. Those are the facts, but I fail to see why I should paint a great big sign and march up and down the street advertising it!

Besides, you never can tell who's gonna see you at one of those things. They've got TV crews there and everything. Why, suppose I had marched and I was on television and my Aunt Ida in Fort Wayne, Indiana sees my face on the 7 o'clock news and has a heart attack when she finds out her favorite niece is a hoh-moh-sexual? (Pause. Looks at herself) Ahhh, who'm I kidding? Everybody knows I'm a hoh-moh-sexual . . . even my Aunt Ida in Fort Wayne. (Pause) I'm afraid to march in that parade, and that's the truth. Big bad Virginia. Hell, I'm gonna do it next year. Yes I am . . .

Oh, I almost forgot. I brought your mail. (Takes a bunch of letters from her back pocket) A whole shitload of letters from the Gay Task Force and all those other do-good organizations that you send money to. (Looking through the letters) Friends of the "this" and people trying to stop the "that." I'm tellin' you, Rosie, you musta sent five dollars to every good cause on this earth. Now, that is a lot of five dollarses. (Pause) Come to think of it, considering how many groups are out there doing good, I wonder why the world hasn't gotten itself saved yet. Probably because I haven't sent in *my* money. Oh yes, they're all waiting for five dollars from Virginia Sedgeway to put 'em over the top. (Catches Rose's face out of the corner of her eye, rushes over to the side of the bed) Did you smile? Did I see a smile? I swear to god, Rose, I think you smiled. (Grabs Rose's hand) Honey, are you there? Can you feel me? (Sits down, rubs her eyes) I'm losin' it, Rosie. I'm imagining things.

All right, I guess it's time to stop fooling around and haul out the big guns. (Pulls a package wrapped in butcher paper out of the shopping bag) Now Rose, up until now, I've been going easy on you, letting you just lie there and pretend you don't hear or see anything. But this foolishness has got to stop. You know what we called your kind in the army? A malingerer. That's what you are, Rosie. You are malingering. You just don't want to get out of bed and come home and do your share of that damn housework, do you? Well my girl, I've got something here that'll put an end to your lazy tricks. Honey, if anything can snap you out of your coma, this is it. (Pulls out some strange-looking sausages and sticks them under Rose's nose) Italian sausages! Your favorite! Goddamit, Rose, do something! Isn't there something way down deep inside of you that wants to grab these smelly old things and sink your teeth into 'em? (Pause) I guess not. You don't care about food anymore, do you, Rose? I never thought I'd see that day. (Collapses into chair) Somehow I got it into my head that smelling Italian sausages would snap you out of your coma. You're laughing at me

now, aren't you, my girl? It's all right. I deserve it. You're married to a fool, there's no doubt about it.

Maybe the doctor's right after all. I just talked to him. He told me that there was . . . no hope. I said, doctor, what about a miracle? He said it was too late for a miracle. Too late! too late! says I. A miracle can happen whenever it damn well pleases. That's what *makes* it a miracle. He just said, "There is no hope," and walked away.

(Focuses intensely on Rose) Rose, is the doctor right about no hope? (Pause) I don't know what I expect you to do. Pop out of your coma and say, "Yes, Virginia, the doctor's right. I'm as good as gone." (Laughs softly) That would be nice, wouldn't it?

Rose, what is going on? Are you here anymore at all? Do you want to be here? You see, I got to know because the doctor says that . . . maybe it's time to . . . the best thing now is to turn off that respirator that's keeping you breathing. (Pause) Is that what you want, baby? My sweet baby. I try to *feel* what's going on inside of you. I try to . . . Help me, Rose, Can you hear me? Can you blink your eyelids, wiggle your fingers, anything (Loud) Rose, what do you want? Oh, why didn't we talk about this? Why did we just pretend you were gonna get better? (Takes Rose's hand) I'm gonna sit here, honey, and be real quiet and you tell me, do you want to stay or do you want to go? (Long pause. Virginia stands, angry) Goddamit, all I can hear is that damn respirator howlin' away. What'm I supposed to do, Rose? You know how I hate to make decisions. It's *your* life, anyhow. It's not fair. Oh, I know just what you'd say right now. "Life's not fair, but it's fun." I wonder how many times I've heard that when something's gone wrong. "Life's not fair, but it's fun." Oh you used to make me so mad with your damn cheerfulness. (Softly) Well, it ain't no fun right now, I'll tell you that, Rosie. (Sits down, puts head in hands) I guess I gotta do for you what I'd want you to do for me. (Pause) And I know damned well I'd want the plug pulled. (Takes Rose's hand) That's it, isn't it, Rose? That's it. Well, if you want it, my girl . . . you shall have it. (Pause) Oh god, Rosie. Oh god oh god oh god.

I'd want the same thing if I was in your shoes, that's for damn sure. Let me tell you, as soon as this whole mess is over, I'm going to hire me a lawyer and he's going to put down on a piece of paper that I do not want to be hooked up to any goddam machine when it's time to go. I don't want to be in a hospital at all. Nosirree, I want to be on a beach in Hawaii . . . or in the backyard under the plum tree! Yes! That's where I want to be. Under the plum tree. I don't care if it's raining and freezing and . . . and *hail* is pouring down. I'm gonna put that in writing so there'll be no mistake about it. Because I know I don't want to be here. (Looks around her) I don't want to be here ever again. You know, Rosie, I've never hated anywhere so much in my life as I hate this hospital. (Vehemently) I hate it.

Now I've got to go about getting that damn machine turned off. Doctor says he needs permission from somebody in your immediate family so's he can do it. So *I've* got to talk to your relatives. I bet that's gonna be fun. What a crew. Bunch of jerks. Still, it's got to be done. Who's the nicest one, Rose? What do you think? Your sister, Roxanne? Roxanne . . . It won't be any trouble for her. She just has to sign a paper. I'll drive down and bring it to her.

I'll take care of you, baby. I know you're suffering. I can feel it. I guess it'll be a big relief, won't it? For me too, Rosie, for me too. (*Slumps down in chair*) It seems like you've been dying for such a long time. I'm beat, honey. I don't sleep good. I wake up—I don't know how many times during the night—and I wonder, has it happened? Is it now? (*Leans intently toward Rose*) It seems to me that even if I'm not with you, I should *know* when you . . . Heil, the whole world'll be different when Rosa Felicia Belbasio isn't in it anymore. Maybe the air'll turn purple, the wind'll start to howl . . . earthquakes, volcanoes . . . something. I don't know. It bothers me that it could happen and I wouldn't know until somebody from the hospital called me and told me. Hell, I don't even know if they *would* call me. That's why I want to *be* here. I guess I'd like to go with you as far as I can go. You always were dragging me to places I never heard of and had no interest in. Maybe if I was here when it happened . . . I don't know . . . I would see a puff of smoke rise up from your body, feel an invisible butterfly touch my face . . . something. I guess I want to catch your soul. (*Pause*)

Rose, I had a dream last night that we both came back to life as eagles. Bald eagles. You know, when an eagle falls in love, it's forever. Even if one of them dies, the one that's left stays on alone. I guess it's too much damn trouble to get used to another eagle. Oh honey, it was a beautiful dream. We were flying and soaring and playing. A nice life. No post office, no mortgage payments, no dirty dishes to wash. Just trees and sky and you and me. I woke up feeling so *good*. (*Pause, then excitedly*) Rose, maybe that's it. That's where this whole thing is leading! We're gonna be eagles together someday! What do you think of that, my girl? Do you think it's possible? It sounds like fun, doesn't it?

(*Looks at watch*) Holy shit, it's 6:45. Goddamit, I don't feel like leaving. I'm just gonna sit here and refuse to move. (*Folds her arms resolutely*) Let 'em call the police. (*Long silence as Virginia waits for nurse to arrive. She feels less and less certain of her defiance as time progresses*) Wait, I've got a better idea! I'm gonna hide behind your bed! You know that nurse usually just sticks her head in and goes on down the hall. Now don't you make a sound. It would be just like you to come out of your coma right now so you could give me away and embarrass me. (*Starts to go behind bed, stops*) Oh Rosie, you know what this reminds me of? Remember when we went to visit your old college friend Adele and she put us in separate bedrooms? And I snuck down the hall in the middle of the night into your room and we were having such a good time . . . you know . . . fooling around. And *then* Adele knocks on the door because she wants to come in and have a little midnight chat with her old college buddy. So I hide in the closet, but I couldn't stop *giggling*. (*Starts laughing at the memory*) So you and Adele are chattin' away, and you're coughin' to beat the band to cover the sound of me giggling. But she hears me anyhow and she throws open the closet door, and there I am standing, stark naked. Oh, I stopped giggling then, didn't I? So Adele tears out of the room. And we pack our bags and skeedaddle in the middle of the night. Oh, I always remember that night whenever they talk about homosexuals being in the closet . . . Uh-oh. Here comes the nurse now. (*Stoops behind bed. Pause, then she looks up at imaginary nurse who has discovered her*) Oh, hello, nurse. (*Stands up*) No,

no. I'm fine. I . . . I . . . I just dropped something! Yes! I think maybe it rolled under the bed somewhere. (Pretends to look under the bed, then glances at nightstand) Oh there they are! The Italian sausages! On the nightstand the whole time. How about that! (Pause) Visiting hours are over? (Scrutinizes her watch in disbelief) My my. How time flies when you're having fun, doesn't it, nurse? (To Rose) Well my dear, it's time to go. (Slowly gathers her things together. Speaks to Rose but obviously is aware of nurse's presence) I love you. You remember that. You're my girl. I'll take care of everything. Don't you worry, Rosie. I'll make everything all right. (Turns to nurse) Goodnight, nurse. (Virginia exits slowly, head held high. Lights fade to black. Sound of respirator continues)

SCENE TWO

(Lights fade up. Sound of respirator continues. Virginia enters, looking exhausted and depressed.)

VIRGINIA Hello there, Rosie. How's my girl? (She turns away from Rose) You know what I did when I left here last night? I got in my car and I drove. I drove and I drove and I drove. All over the city. Couldn't face the thought of going home alone . . . again. That's not the first time I've done that either, my girl. I'm wasting a hell of a lot of money on gasoline. I can't afford it.

Do you know what I did when I got home? I contacted your relatives. Rose, I know you don't want to hear all the gory details after spending a lifetime dealing with that bunch, so I'll just give you the short version. Your sister Roxanne wouldn't speak to me; your brother Roland told me it was God's will you were on a respirator and, being a good Christian, he didn't want to interfere; and your father's in a rest home, not doing too well himself. And that was it for your immediate family.

I just spoke to the doctor and he says that there's nothing he can do if they don't want to get involved. He says we'll have to "let nature take its course." I'm sorry, baby. I'll tell you, Rosie, between God's will, the hospital's will, and the doctor's will, there's not too much left over for us, is there? (Walks over to respirator) Looks to me like this machine's got more say in the situation than we have.

"Let nature take its course." Let nature take its course. (Furious) I would like to know what the hell this machine that's keeping you breathing has got to do with nature. Hell, if you were out in nature, some wild animal would come along and *kill* you. Nature wouldn't allow you to suffer like this! (Staring at the respirator) Machines. I *hate* machines. They pretend to be your friend, but they'll stab you in the back when they get the chance. (Bitterly) Machines.

And doctors! That's another real disappointing subject, isn't it, Rose? Can you imagine, I thought they knew it all. I thought doctors were special. Not like gods exactly. But in between being human and being a god. But guess what, Rosie. They're just stumbling around in the dark like all the rest of us. Isn't that sad? I wish they *were* gods. (Pause) Your doctor . . . oh, he's not so bad. He didn't give you the cancer, after all. I have to keep reminding myself of that. I just wish he cared a little more. But he's too busy. Doesn't have the time. Besides, I guess he'd be real sad if he did care. If he understood that *you*, Rosie Belbasio, were dying. Not just anybody. But *you*.

You know, Rose, I think that my own death will be a hell of a lot easier for me than yours. For one thing, I'll have had a lot of practice with yours. For another, I won't worry about being lonely. I don't think people worry

about being lonely when they're dying, do you, Rosie? So in a lot of ways, what's happening right now is the worst thing that could happen to me.

You know, Rose, when we fell in love it was all nice and beautiful. And now it's come to this. I wonder if I would have had the guts to fall in love with you if I had known how it was gonna end up. This love business is pretty tricky, isn't it? Sets you up for a big fall. It hurts too damn much.

(Turns on Rose) Goddamit. Rose, why did you have to go and get sick? Now they say that when you get cancer, that it's your own fault, that you have brought it on yourself somehow. And why didn't you go to the doctor when you first noticed the blood? (Sarcastic) Oh no, Rosie doesn't believe in doctors. So Rosie waits *six months* before she even says a word to me. And then I had to *drag* you to the doctor. (Spits the words out) That's just plain stupid, woman. *STUPID*. Maybe they could have saved you. And all that money we threw away on that laetrile, and those herbs and mega-vitamins. And the hot baths and the cold baths and rubbing your body with a natural bristle brush and giving you coffee enemas. And all the time I took off from work to cart you to this doctor and that doctor or just to be with you. And *then*, to top it all off, toward the end you turn nasty on me and you *insult* me when I come to visit. I've done everything I can for you. (Out of control) Goddamit, woman, I'm sick of it. I'm sick of coming here and sitting with you. I'm sick of talking to that doctor. I'm sick of thinking about you all the time. I'm sick and tired and broke and fed up. I wish you'd *die*, woman, and set me free.

(Pause. She can't believe what she's said. Her words tumble out) I'm sorry. Rose, I'm sorry. I didn't mean it. I never even thought it. I'm sorry. I didn't mean it. I didn't mean it. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. (Pause. Defeated) I'm sorry for so many things. For not keeping the house clean. For not going to the Gay Parade with you. I'm sorry for all the times I got drunk and embarrassed you in public. (Pause) Maybe I shoulda borrowed some more money and taken you to another doctor, a better doctor. Maybe I shoulda moved you to a better hospital. What do you think, Rosie? What do you think?

You know what I regret the most? That I never told you that I forgave you for having that . . . that affair with Sandy, way back when. Every day I'd come here and I'd say to myself, "Tell her you forgive her, goddamit. Tell her." But . . . I don't know . . . you'd be in a bad mood or I'd be tired . . . It never seemed like the right time. And then one day I showed up and you couldn't hear me anymore. (Pause) I guess I might as well say it now. I forgive you, Rose. It doesn't matter. Outta 27 good years, a few bad months, what difference does it make? Can you hear me, Rosie? It doesn't matter anymore. It hasn't for a long time.

(Notices flowers in pitcher) Damn, I forgot the flowers today. I'm losin' it, Rosie.

(Virginia is spent, calm) You know, last night, when I couldn't sleep, this song kept going through my head. I learned it when I was a little girl at church camp. (Sings) "Death is a long, long sleep. Sleep is a short short death that softens but never ends life's grief. Death is a long long sleep." That's a hell of a song to teach little kids, isn't it? I loved it, though. It's a round. You know, one person starts singing and then another person

comes in the middle of the song and then another and another. So the song never ends. I used to love to sing rounds when I was a little girl.

(Looks at watch) Well, my girl, visiting hours aren't over yet. But I'm beat. I think I'll go. But I'll be back tomorrow, don't you worry. Same time, same station. (Stands up, stretches) One last kiss before I go. (Bends down to kiss Rose, then jumps up, turns around, walks to door and looks out in hall. Turns around, stops) Jesus christ, look what they've done to me, Rose. Here we are in the hospital. I might never see you again, and I'm *still* afraid somebody might catch me kissing you on the lips. Isn't that something? I've spent so many years hiding and pretending that it doesn't matter anymore if there's anyone actually watching. Because there's always somebody watching . . . inside of me. I feel like I been walking around my whole life with a great big rock on my chest.

And now they tell me that after living with you for 27 years and coming to visit you in this stinkin' hospital every single day, that I'm nobody to you, that I got no rights. (Angry, crying) Oh, if I was some man who met you and married you two months ago, that would be different. A *man* would have the right to say, "This person can't speak for herself anymore, but I love her and I believe she wants to die." Oh, they would listen to a man, wouldn't they? But me, I'm just queer old Virginia, so I don't count. They can tell me when I have to get out of this room. Those are the rules. Those are the rules! **THOSE ARE THE RULES!** (Pause) Well, *who the hell made those rules?* They've got no right to make rules that come between you and me, my girl.

Rose, I want to hold you so close right now. I want to press you, squeeze you to me so hard. I want to wrap myself around you. But I can't because you got all those damn tubes running in and out of you. Damn them. Damn them all with their tubes and rules and papers and machines.

Oh Rosie, do you want me to turn that respirator off right now? With my own hands? I could. I know which dial it is. I've seen the nurses fiddling with it. I could walk over there, put my hand on that big blue dial and . . . I'm scared, Rose. What if I get caught. (Looks at watch) I've got time.

Oh baby, I know you're suffering. I can *feel* it. But what'm I gonna do without you? At least now I can come here and sit and talk. It's better than nothing. When you're gone, people will think I'm crazy to talk to you. Now they just think I'm a fool. I know I just said I wish you'd die, but I'm afraid to live without you. I'm afraid, baby.

You want me to turn it off, don't you? Rose, I love you too much to do it. And I love you too much not to do it. Damn this world for making us suffer just because we love each other.

Rose, I love you so much. You have blessed my life. Nobody's luckier than me. Nobody. You are my sweet baby, my honey, my lover . . . my wife. You *are* my wife. You and I know that. And I've got a right to turn that respirator off. I've got a **RIGHT**. Don't I, Rose? (Walks to door, looks out into hospital corridor, softly closes door. Turns to face Rose) You're my girl, Rosie. You remember that. Always were and always will be. (Walks over to respirator. Slowly reaches for dial and turns it off. As she turns the dial, the sound of the respirator fades away. Virginia sits down and takes Rose's hand) Don't forget about being eagles, now. You wait for me, Rosie. (Lights fade slowly to black)

END

Author's Afterword

IMMEDIATE FAMILY was inspired by two events. The first was a series of articles in the newspaper in 1980 about a nurse in a nursing home in Las Vegas who was accused of turning off the respirators of patients in order to win bets with other employees on when the patients were going to die. Although the nurse was presented in the most lurid, unsympathetic light by the papers, it didn't take too much imagination to conceive of a person who would turn off a respirator out of love.*

At about the same time, my beloved dog, Dotty, was dying of cancer. It was a very long, drawn-out process, as cancer deaths often are, and I experienced all the emotions that Virginia experiences in the play. I think that because Dotty was a dog and my relationship with her was very pure, as it is with animals that we love, I was able to observe myself at the same time as I was experiencing these intense feelings, rather than getting dragged down into them and confused by them, as I'm sure I would have if I were dealing with the death of a human being that I loved. Ultimately, I had Dotty "put to sleep" by her vet. I suppose I should use the word "euthanize," but it sounds so cold and clinical. Dotty's death was very peaceful and beautiful and I was happy that I could end her obvious suffering. It struck me as idiotic at the time that our society reserves a humane death only for the non-humans.

When I first wrote the play, I wrote it from the viewpoint of a nurse, whom I made a very strange character who only felt comfortable with people in comas. It all went fine until the end, when I had to come up with a powerful reason for her to turn off the respirator. You see, although I believed that it could be right to turn off a respirator and allow a person to die, dramatically I felt it would be stronger to make this the first time and so the nurse needed some extra push to do what she had thought of doing so many times before. I came up with the idea that the nurse decided to turn off the machine because the woman in a coma was a lesbian and those who had the legal power to disconnect it had disowned her long ago. From there, it was a very short step to realizing that if the character were the lesbian lover of the comatose patient, rather than a nurse, her motivation would be very strong indeed.

I created the script partly through writing and partly through improvising. That is, I pretended to be Virginia in the hospital room and

* The nurse was referred to as "Death's Angel" by the papers, and that was the original title of the play.

spoke into a tape recorder. The script came about equally from these two methods. I also "stole" from real life. The incident of Virginia demanding that Rose's room be switched comes directly from my neighbors, an older married couple. The husband did actually bring a thermometer to the hospital to prove that his wife's room was too cold.

Quite often, I felt as if someone were speaking through me, which is a most exhilarating feeling. It seemed as if there was a Virginia Sedgeway out there who was using me to tell her story. When I had developed about three hours of material this way, my best friend and collaborator, Carolyn Myers, came in and helped me hack my way through the underbrush and find some dramatic shape in the huge welter of emotions and reminiscing that had spilled out of me. My lover at the time, Margo Tufo, was very supportive of me through all this and created all the publicity and technical elements for the first performance at the National Festival of Women's Theater.

List of Plays

EGO TRIP, OR I'M GETTING MY SHIT TOGETHER AND DUMPING IT ALL ON YOU,
by Terry Baum

SACRIFICES, A FABLE OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT, by Carolyn Myers, Terry
Baum, Michele Linfante, and Renais Winter

GOOD FOOD, by Terry Baum, Carolyn Myers, Cynthia Moore, Charlotte
Colavin, and Shelley Fields

WOMEN IN LINE, by Terry Baum

MOONLIGHTING, A PLAY ABOUT WOMEN AND WORK, by Terry Baum and
Carolyn Myers

DOS LESBOS, by Terry Baum and Carolyn Myers

OUT OF BOUNDS

by
Mariah Burton Nelson

Production History

OUT OF BOUNDS made its debut in 1984 at the National Festival of Women's Theater in Santa Cruz, California, and has toured San Francisco and Albuquerque, New Mexico. The original production included:

Director: Jess Miller

Emily: Cheri Toney

Rita: Victoria Johnson

All inquiries concerning *all* rights should be addressed to: Maria Burton Nelson, P.O. Box 2051, Menlo Park, California 94026, or c/o Sarah B. Nelson, 5219 N. 24th Street, Phoenix, Arizona 85016.

Author's Notes

I write about myself because that's all I know. By giving myself new names and shapes and the freedom to fictionalize, I find humor and occasionally even wisdom in situations I'd previously taken very seriously.

Set in a locker room, the play explores homophobia, enforced femininity, stardom, disillusionment, spirituality, the paradox of athletic injury, and a tender bond between two young women who are facing difficult decisions in their careers and their relationship as they come of age in the passionate and competitive world of women's sports.

Because it is a realistic play, the actors should look like college basketball players (which can make casting a challenge since many good

actors are too short, old, or heavy to look the part). I also suggest that one or both of the actors be Black, since a disproportionately large number of high-caliber players are Black, and since historically, Black actors have rarely had the opportunity to play the parts of strong, quick-witted, creative, introspective, playful women.

Editor's Notes

This play could be called a "director's play." It requires a deft, imaginative, and disciplined guidance. Many of its most important interactions between characters, and the majority of its most significant action gearshifts, occur in the silence between "beats." In reading, the simplicity of the script's structure masks the play's complexity, and the script's brevity masks the play's subtlety. This script is deceptive. It works very well on stage, perhaps better than it reads.

The play is lively and demands great physical energy from its actors. The text is not the major communicator in this play; it is the sub-text which demands discovery and focus. Do that work for this script and your audience will enthusiastically reward the play.

Note: Although neither of the characters demonstrates a "Black consciousness," casting Black women in this script, as requested by the playwright, works beautifully. If you have that option, use it. Casting Third World actors in racially neutral roles is a viable choice, often overlooked in all types of theater. Those of us who take part in casting decisions need to remember this.

OUT OF BOUNDS

At stage right and stage left are rows of lockers; each locker has a bench center stage of it. A large open-topped trash can is down right. The locker room is strewn with the remains of celebration: streamers, confetti, champagne bottles. A large sign on the back wall or on the side of a locker reads, "The one who wins is the one who believes he can"; an "s" has been inserted in front of "he" in a different color ink.

The actors are two young athletic women, preferably fairly tall, preferably one or both black. Throughout the scene, they empty the contents of their lockers into gym bags and the trash can. They also take off high-top sneakers, two pairs of socks, ankle tape, knee braces, knee pads, etc., and put on street shoes (probably running shoes) and warm-up suits. Emily might have already taken off some shoes, socks, etc. by the time the curtain opens.

If either actor is proficient at ball handling, one or both might spend some time dribbling or spinning or tossing back and forth a ball that one of them finds in her locker. However, the ball should be used minimally if at all.

The women are dressed in matching college uniforms; their numbers should be similar, such as #21 and #22.

When the curtain opens, Emily is alone in the locker room, dancing around to music coming from a portable tape player and singing along with some of the lyrics. The music is popular rock or reggae by a woman artist such as Rita Marley, the Pointer Sisters, or Stevie Nicks. Emily dances casually, unselfconsciously, stopping to peel off a few articles of clothing or toss things into her gym bag. When the song ends, she straddles one of the benches and addresses the audience.

EMILY It was like magic. It was like everything slowed down and got really easy, it was almost like the basket was this huge magnet, and everything we put up went in. That was after halftime, when Hartman brought us in here and yelled at us. But once the second half began, and we really started rolling, I didn't even care if we won, believe it or not, but I knew we would. Then . . . I don't even know who shot the ball — oh yeah, it was Rita, from the corner. I sort of felt her shoot it. I was blocking someone out waiting for the rebound, even though I knew it would go in — Hartman says if we don't block out, we don't play, period, even if we're sure the ball's going in. Anyway, I watched the ball arch up in this circle like the moon or something — I know that sounds corny but that's what I thought. I just stood there thinking, "There goes the moon . . ." Then I swear it felt like the ball went right through me, or like my body was the basket, and I could feel the ball go right through. It felt wonderful. Then — oh god, there was this other

time when Rita made this incredible shot . . . it wasn't just tapping it in off a rebound, it was off a pass, like (**Jumping up to demonstrate**) the basket's here and I'm Rita and someone passes me the ball from way over there and I leap up to catch it, then turn and shoot it in mid-air. And it goes in. Everyone in the stands goes *crazy* at the same time and Rita just runs back on defense, all cool, not even cracking a smile or anything.

RITA (**From offstage**) Chooch?

EMILY What? No, she's gone. Rita?

RITA (**Enters**) Is Chooch in here?

EMILY She left already.

RITA (**With false casualness**) Oh, Emily. Hi. I didn't know you were still around.

EMILY My locker's a mess. What'd you want Chooch for?

RITA Oh, uh, that reporter was looking for her. He wanted to know when she's going in for surgery.

EMILY It better be soon.

RITA No kidding. Her knees are *shot*.

EMILY Look who's talking. You're limping again, aren't you?

RITA Naw.

EMILY Did you ice the right one?

RITA Hey, did I ask for another mother?

(**There is a silence as Rita wanders awkwardly around the room**)

RITA Where is everyone?

EMILY You were out there a long time,

RITA I guess they're over at Poco's for that party.

EMILY Do you want to go? I think Hartman's even going to make an appearance.

RITA I never feel that hungry right after a game, do you?

EMILY Don't you have to go tell that guy that Chooch already left?

RITA He'll figure it out.

(**Rita saunters over to her locker, again with false casualness; she has discovered an excuse to hang around. There is a brief silence as she opens her locker**)

RITA I never know what to say after games. What is there to say? I can't even remember what happened in the game, except the times I blew it, and the reporter keeps waiting for me to say something profound. You know what I said tonight? I said, "Yeah, we played really well. And the other team, they didn't play as well as we did. That's why we won." I mean really, what do they want?

EMILY The only fun ones are when they ask you if playing basketball threatens your *femininity*.

RITA (Mocking a reporter, holding an imaginary microphone in her hand)
"Tell me, Emily, do you feel a conflict between being a basketball player and being a woman?"

EMILY "Well, yes, George, as a matter of fact, sometimes it *is* a problem. Every once in a while when I'm dribbling down court the ball gets caught in my vagina . . .

(They both laugh)

RITA You are so bad!

EMILY Listen, they said to hurry up or they'll eat all the chips.

RITA You'd think . . . I always thought I'd feel so happy right now. I don't, though. I don't even know what I feel. Here we are, we did it, we're national champs. But I just wish . . . I wish things had been . . . different.

EMILY What do you mean? You're the star, Rita. And tonight, you were great. Shit, you kept Carter to sixteen and scored what, thirty?

RITA Twenty-eight. But that's not what I meant. Do you? Do you feel really happy?

EMILY I guess so. I couldn't believe that jumper you made. Then Poco sinking those free throws.

RITA But now that it's all over . . .

EMILY Yeah, I was so aware that this was my last college game, and that I'll never quite feel this good again. Oh, I don't know. Maybe I will. But there was something so *magical* about it.

RITA You and your magic.

EMILY Don't you know what I mean?

RITA Just don't call it magic.

EMILY Why? Does it sound like witchcraft or something?

RITA Something.

(Emily begins cleaning out her locker, laughs)

RITA What?

EMILY Remember when you saved that ball?

RITA Oh no! I landed right on top of that guy from NBC. And then when I tried to get up, my shoelace got caught in his tripod . . .

EMILY Now we get to watch it on T.V.! Ha!

RITA The big time!

EMILY We should have another party that night and watch it together.

RITA I'm gonna tell that T.V. guy to cut that part out. Do a commercial then.

EMILY Maybe they'll hire *us* to do commercials.

RITA For deodorant or something.

EMILY How much would they have to pay you to do a sanitary napkins one?

RITA How 'bout for feminine hygiene spray? Can you imagine? They show you walking off the court . . . (She mimes holding a basketball under one arm, pulls a real can of deodorant out of her locker and holds it up to her cheek, smiling) "I keep fresh all day with SprayAway."

EMILY "Of course, it gave me cancer, but I smell like a fresh lemon . . ."

RITA " . . . and that's all that matters."

(Rita squirts the deodorant toward Emily. Emily grabs it from Rita and aims it at Rita's crotch.

EMILY Here, I'll keep you fresh!

RITA (Squeals and runs away, trying to be accusatory but actually amused) You are so gross! (Rita stops at the trash can and switches the scene to a basketball game) Here! Pass it here! I'll hook it in!

(Emily fakes a pass to Rita and pretends to be dribbling the deodorant toward the trash can.

RITA (Sourly) You always were a ball hog.

EMILY (Stops, looks at Rita, hurt) I am not.

RITA You never did pass me the ball.

EMILY Well, somebody did, for you to score twenty-eight.

RITA (Shrugs) How many'd you have?

EMILY (Disappointed) Eighteen. Nine buckets. I didn't take any free throws all night, those refs didn't call shit.

(Emily plops down onto the bench)

RITA Would you please stop —

EMILY I thought it was just the Lord's name.

RITA You'd think a lit major would have a more sophisticated vocabulary.

EMILY O.K.! You don't have to act all haughty and superior just because you had twenty-eight points. Big deal, Rita.

RITA I never said it was a big deal! You're the one who's keeping track. Since when is eighteen points something to be ashamed of? Only when it's compared to twenty-eight, right? Why don't you take a look at who's being competitive?

EMILY Competitive? I've supported you all along.

RITA I don't need your support.

EMILY I thought this was a team sport.

RITA Look, if you weren't competitive you never would have come this far. Neither would I. I don't want to fight. (Pause) I just don't know where I'm going from here.

EMILY To the big O, right? Did you fill out the application yet?

RITA No. Why? Are you thinking of trying out for the Olympics?

EMILY I might. Maybe make a xerox of yours.

RITA (With a note of ambivalence) You should. You really should. Hartman keeps going on and on about how much you've improved. You've really got a good chance.

EMILY Do you think there's a chance we'd both make it? Don't you think we'd make a good team? Maybe because—I don't know, maybe because we've played together. We'd be great, don't you think? Wouldn't that be great?

RITA Well, you will. You played so good in those Pan Am Games, and Shirley's coaching the Olympics too. It'll be no problem for you. I'm really happy for you. But sometimes I think I'd rather . . . Sometimes I think the Olympics aren't that big a deal. (Rita takes off her wristbands and "shoots" them into or toward the trash can. She follows and drops them in if she misses) I mean, they *are*, but . . .

EMILY What are you doing with those? Don't you want them?

RITA They're completely grungy.

EMILY Well, I'll take 'em.

RITA I mean, *completely* grungy.

EMILY I want 'em anyway.

RITA What are you going to do with them? Auction them off to my fans?

EMILY (Shyly) I just want 'em.

(Emily pulls the wrist bands out of the trash can and puts them into her gym bag)

(Pause)

RITA Can I ask you something?

EMILY Shoot.

RITA Is Hartman . . . you know.

EMILY What?

RITA You know.

EMILY Yeah, but I love hearing you choke on the word.

RITA Just answer the question.

EMILY Only her assistant coach knows for sure.

RITA Come on.

EMILY Of course they are. They're no fools.

RITA Really? (Pause) Is Poco? (Emily nods) Was I really the only straight person on the team? Well . . . I guess there's Jean and Subie and—I guess Chooch is practically married but I feel like—like it's *heterosexuality* that's beginning to look abnormal.

EMILY Can't argue with that.

RITA Really, how do you tell who is?

EMILY You've come a long way, you know that? Remember when you thought homophobia meant fear of going home?

RITA How am I supposed to learn anything if you won't give me a straight answer?

EMILY Here's your straight answer. You can tell by the smiles. A lesbian is a woman with a smile that started deep down in her pelvis. When you pass her on the street—or on the court—her smile glows all around you like a sudden sunset, bursting with every color. Especially when two or three lesbians are together. I've seen people drop packages . . .

RITA (Under her breath) Oh, come on . . .

EMILY (Overlapping) . . . I swear, and it's not because of some taboo. It's the energy. Sometimes a woman will just keep the pleasure all to herself, but you can still feel it, or sometimes she won't even be happy at all, but there's still something so right about loving women that she just sort of glows with the beauty of it.

(Long pause)

RITA (Pulls the application to the Olympic tryouts from her locker and hands it to Emily) You can make a xerox if you want.

EMILY Great, I'll get it back to you tomorrow.

RITA You can just keep it.

EMILY Are you serious? You're really not going to go for it? I thought the Olympics was your biggest dream, Rita!

RITA It's just not all it's cracked up to be. What do you do with an Olympic medal? Wear it around your neck? Melt it down? Talk about it the rest of your life? Basketball is nothing. There's this gym with all these people running around, and it's fun, but for one thing it ruins your social life. Hah! What social life? You can't stay up late, you can't even go home over Christmas. And you can't go skiing or roller skating or anything because your coach is afraid you'll break your leg. Even if you don't break your leg, you ruin your knees or ankles but they keep taping you up and sending you out there, because what would the team do without you? And they admit, well, yes, you might have arthritis by the time you're thirty-five, but *they* don't care because they won't be around then. And you don't really care because you might not be around then either, but in your dreams you're

always trying to play wheelchair basketball — except you're the only one on the court who's in a wheelchair. So you walk around all proud, like you're this great athlete with a pulse of around forty and lungs the size of a basketball and everyone thinks you're real tough but secretly you know you can't even go downstairs anymore without all these sharp pains . . . (Pause)

Do you know how empty I feel when little girls ask me for autographs? It's like they want something from me, something they can count on, grow up on, something they can trust. And all I can do is sign my name. I used to say things like, "Good luck in your season," but what does that mean? I don't even care if they keep playing basketball. There must be other valuable things to do in life.

EMILY Like what?

RITA Like — be a librarian.

EMILY A what?

RITA I was talking to a librarian at school yesterday. She had all these nice little laugh lines around her eyes — I could tell she was really happy just hanging around helping people find books. I asked her what she did for exercise and she said nothing except climb ladders a few times a day. She never strains or sweats or pushes her body to do anything in particular against its will. I thought, maybe I'll go be a librarian. Something with redeeming social value.

EMILY It'll be the same wherever you go.

RITA What will.

EMILY You will.

RITA What do you mean?

EMILY You take yourself with you.

RITA What are you talking about?

EMILY I've been reading Kabir. He said, "What is found now is found then." What he meant was, if you're unhappy shooting buckets you'll be unhappy shelving books. So you might as well enjoy what you're doing in stead of bumming out about sore knees and not getting to go roller skating. Don't fool yourself into thinking you'll be happy all of a sudden if you quit.

RITA Who said anything about quitting?

EMILY Well, I sure hope you don't. You're in your prime, Rita.

RITA The prime of what? It's not like we can go out and make two hundred thousand dollars playing hoops like the men can.

(Pause)

EMILY You're afraid, aren't you?

RITA What?

EMILY I never noticed it before.

RITA What would I be afraid of?

EMILY (Slowly) Basketball, I guess. Where it might take you or not take you. Afraid to know how good you could be—you could be awesome, Rita, but you're afraid to find out. Afraid of pain, of your body failing you, of not being a star, of not being anyone special. Afraid of looking for and not finding anything—or anyone—you could possibly love as much as basketball. (Long pause)

I don't know why, but I also think you're afraid of not making the Olympic team.

(Rita turns away or otherwise acknowledges that Emily is right)

RITA You know I could make it.

EMILY Yeah, I know.

RITA Well, I know too, so why try out?

(Long pause)

EMILY You know how I feel? I think I'll try out for the Olympics—and I think you will too—because when you've come this far, you have to. You have to see how far you can go or else you're an old woman sitting there wondering. But you know what I'd really like to do? Have you ever been to Hawaii? I'd like to go to Hawaii or maybe even Oregon—some place that has sandy beaches, deserted ones, and just run. I'd be barefoot, like a normal person on a beach, with no ankle tape or ace bandages, no hightops or blister tape or two pairs of socks, and I'd run—I'd run like some gazelle. Or I'd flap my arms up and down like some huge bird if I felt like it . . .

RITA With no basket at the other end.

EMILY Yeah, and no getting back on defense, and no one telling me I'm not jumping high enough . . .

RITA No one screaming out the time . . .

EMILY And no one yelling, "Push, push, push!"

RITA Yeah.

EMILY And when I got tired, I'd just flop onto the warm sand, and maybe roll into the ocean like a log and float out there for a while, with the sun on my face, my whole body smiling.

(There is a silence as the two women slowly bring themselves back from this fantasy and return to the task of cleaning out their lockers)

RITA (Pulling an orange out of her locker) Do you want this?

EMILY How long's it been in there?

RITA Years.

EMILY No, you go ahead.

RITA (Peels and eats the orange) Sure you don't want some?

(Rita eats for a while in silence. Then Emily pulls a razor out of her locker)

RITA What's that?

EMILY What?

RITA In your hand.

EMILY Oh. It's a razor.

RITA What do you use it for?

EMILY Nothing yet. I thought—I keep thinking I need to shave my pits.

RITA Why would you do a thing like that? I thought you always said . . . oh!
I know why. I just got it. It's the Olympic trials. Is that really it?

EMILY Have you ever seen a woman in the Olympics with hairy pits?

RITA I thought you were a woman of principle.

EMILY Stop that. I am, but certain compromises are necessary if—

RITA You really think they take people on the basis of looks?

EMILY Of course they do. Remember the Pan Am tryouts? The very best player didn't make it. I swear it was because she wore the same dirty t-shirt every day. You have to look like a clean-cut, all-American "girl," and that includes femmy.

RITA But you said it's so natural to be hairy, and women shouldn't have to mold themselves into Barbie dolls, and all that.

EMILY What do you want? I got a modeling contract with *Ebony*, O.K.?

RITA You did not.

EMILY I just feel like having smooth pits for a change.

RITA Let me see that.

EMILY (Handing her the razor) It's just a regular razor.

RITA Well, if this is the key to your future. . . (Pretends to be shaving her underarms)

EMILY Stop that.

RITA If it works for you, it'll work for me, right? I need a little trim myself.

EMILY O.K., give it back now. (Reaches for the razor)

RITA Don't do it, really. I like your pits that way. (Catching herself) I mean, you'd lose feminist credibility.

EMILY I'm not your token radical anymore. (Teasing) And not everyone out there is going to be as fond of my hairy armpits as you are.

RITA (Handing the razor back to Emily) Here, I don't care about your stupid armpits.

(Emily walks across the stage, regarding the razor thoughtfully. She turns and faces Rita; they look at each other for a moment in silence. Then Emily holds the razor to her crotch, with the blade end away from herself)

EMILY You'd like me if I had one of these, wouldn't you?

RITA (Who has been sitting, leaps up to chase Emily) You are really gross! I'm gonna get you!

(They run around and leap over one bench, at times facing each other in the defensive stance of basketball. Emily is laughing, playful. Rita is trying to be angry, but is laughing in spite of herself. Finally Rita grabs Emily or Emily allows herself to be "caught," it is not clear which, and they wrestle to the floor. After a struggle, Rita ends up sitting on Emily, pinning her arms to the floor and looking down at her. Emily is delighted. They both breathe heavily.)

EMILY You got me, Rita. (Pause, deliberately) So now what do we do?

(Rita quickly stands and returns to one of the benches, facing away from Emily. Emily lies on the floor for a moment longer, then gets up and sits on the opposite bench. They look at each other.)

RITA I don't know what's happening, Emmy. The season's over, everything's over, so now we just finish our classes and everything . . . but everything's changing, and I don't know where I'm going. I don't really know what I'm trying to say.

EMILY What is it?

RITA I just—I just want you to know—I wish—I just wish I could have been . . .

EMILY (Patient but curious) What?

RITA I wish I could have been more . . . more . . . tender with you.

(There is a long pause)

EMILY (Softly) Rita, would you please say that again?

RITA You heard me.

(Emily slowly stands and walks toward Rita. Rita stands and takes a few steps toward Emily, also slowly. They stop within a foot of each other and stand looking at each other, close but not touching, for a few moments before the curtain closes.)

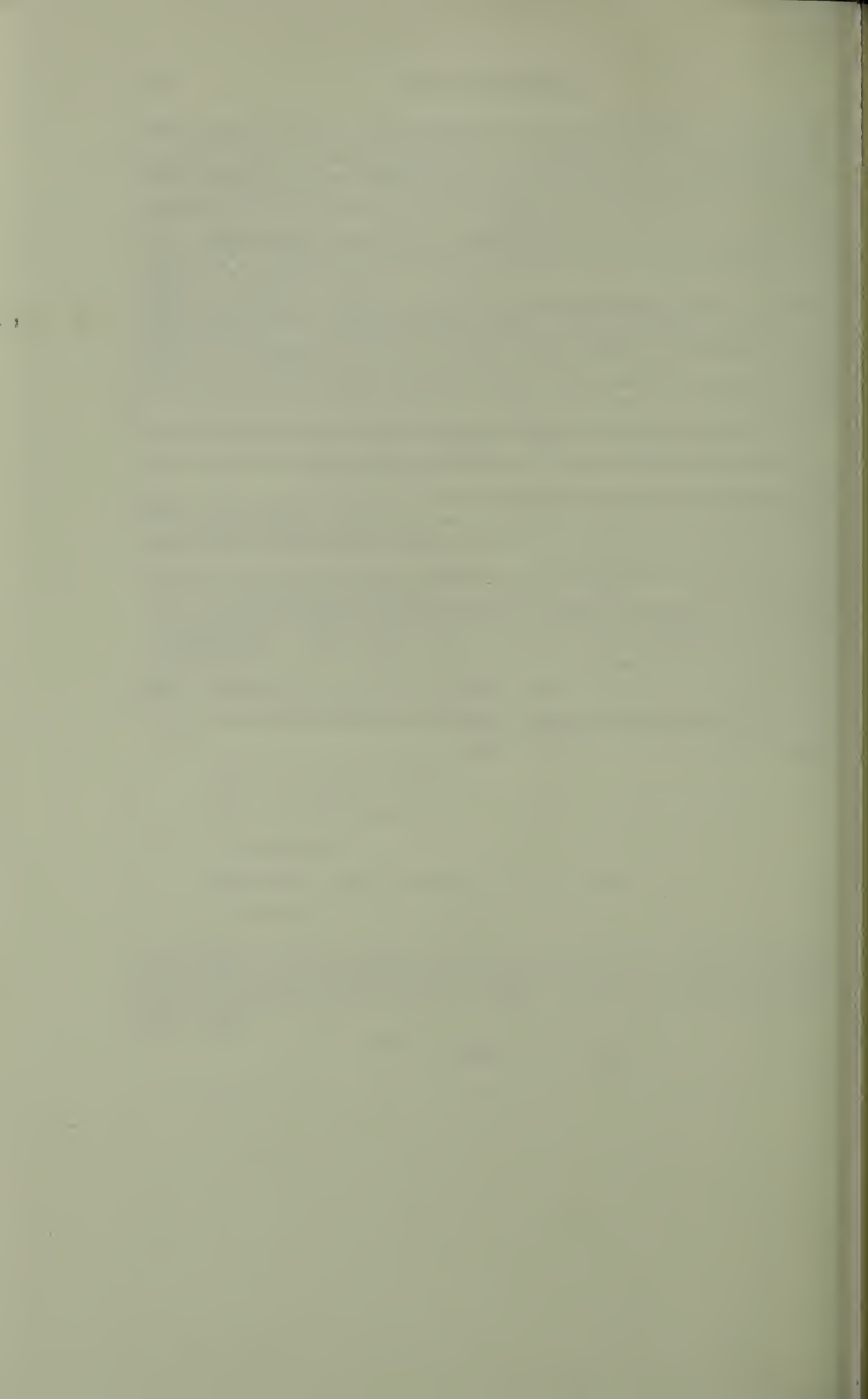
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Author's Afterword

OUT OF BOUNDS emerged out of my experiences playing basketball at Stanford and then professionally in Europe, New Jersey, California, and Texas. I had written 100 pages of a women's basketball novel when I happened to take an improvisational theater class. It was soon afterward, while studying playwrighting, that Emily and Rita voiced a strong preference for acting out their drama on stage rather than in the stuffy confines of a book. Who was I to say no? In fact, I was delighted, because then I no longer had an unfinished novel on my hands.

In early stages of the writing, I thought I was creating composites of numerous former teammates. As the work progressed, I came to realize that both characters represent aspects of myself.

During the play's San Francisco run in January 1985, one of the actors suddenly became ill and I was the only person the director could find who looked the part and knew the lines (sort of). So after three short rehearsals I made my stage debut in San Francisco — a horrifying, ego-shattering experience that unexpectedly catapulted me into a new level of awareness of what the play is about, why the characters behave as they do, who I used to be, and who I am now. Being an actor in my own play also reminded me that Shakespeare was right: all the world is indeed a stage.



RUBY CHRISTMAS

by
Sarah Dreher

Production History

RUBY CHRISTMAS was first performed as part of the Plays in Process series at The People's Theater, Cambridge, Massachusetts, running December 14 through December 22, 1981.

Cast

Harriet – Susan Bigger
Charlotte – Miriam Adlerstein
Lorraine – Carol Briskin
Kelley – Libba Ingram
Bronwen – Elisa River Stacy
Adele – Sandra Levitt

(The part of Maryann was added after this production.)

Directed by Jennifer Justice

Artistic Director for People's Theater – June Judson

All inquiries concerning *all* rights to this script should be addressed to Sarah Dreher, 21 Valley View Drive, Amherst, Massachusetts 01002.

Author's Notes

RUBY CHRISTMAS is a play about choices and their consequences. It is a play about class differences. A play about going too far, about words spoken and deeds done that can never be undone. A play about two strong-willed women, mother and daughter, each of whom wants

acceptance from, but cannot grant acceptance to, the other. Above all, it is a play about a woman, Harriet, who sacrifices her dreams, her daughter, and ultimately herself to escape the poverty she was born into and which she can never forget.

RUBY CHRISTMAS can be performed with a full set, or with a skeletal, abstract set, as long as the impression of upper-middle-class luxury is maintained. The essential elements are the Christmas tree, symbolizing the artificial, imposed "familyness" of the occasion – and the large portrait of Frank, which dominates the scene. The portrait and the sound of the Betamax provide constant reminders that it is *his* house, *his* money, and *his* values that control the lives of *his* family.

Editor's Notes

RUBY CHRISTMAS is a conventionally structured play with an unconventional focus. My hope is that this play signals a modern *genre* of theater: the Mother/Daughter play *without villains*. (We can't have too many of those, and we have too few of them.)

In this play live flawed and very interesting people striving to cope with: one another, the fact of male privilege, the habit of lying (mainly to oneself) and its consequences, real boundaries, and imagined limits.

The script is beautifully crafted. It offers many multi-dimensional characters, struggling in multi-level relationships. There really aren't any small roles in this play. Even the characters who appear briefly on stage have depth and circumference.

The playwright's choice to present the always-absent-but-ever-present father, and the devices chosen to portray his character (the portrait, the blaring VCR, Harriet's drone-like concern for, and compulsion to anticipate, his needs), offer in my experience one of the theater's most accurate and potent critiques of the patriarchal definition of "family." The blatant assumption of his intrusive privilege, as experienced by his women, gives superb expression to the gap between how women feel about male privilege versus how men *say* women feel about male privilege. This aspect of the play is integral to all the other conflicts; pay close attention to it. (Clearly, everything in this house "belongs" to Frank, but this play is Harriet's, and that is so satisfying.)

This play makes me care a lot about: all the characters (even Frank – "caring" doesn't *always* mean *liking*), what they do and don't

do, what they say and don't say (the missed chances are terribly important here); and I cared about what happens and doesn't happen after the final curtain.

Because of its complex, incisive, compassionate overview of the varied relationships between the women in its story, and in spite of some of the implications of its ending, the play offers a remarkably cleansing event.

There is integrity (wholeness) here: no attempt to simplify matters or make them seem better or worse than they are. The breadth of this play's understanding of human events, especially losses, manages somehow to underscore not the limitations but the possibilities of life. That last sentence is not a contradiction; it is my attempt to describe a rare and evocative perspective.

RUBY CHRISTMAS is a fine, strong play, a tender tragedy that dares to enter the mainly uncharted, confusing, and stormy territory of Mothers and Daughters and does so with courage and brightness.

Cast of Characters

Harriet Sibley	Bronwen Sibley
Charlotte Lansing	Kelley Tobin
Maryann Lansing	Adele O'Connor
Lorraine Sibley	

Props List

ACT ONE:

Glasses with liquor and ice – Harriet and Charlotte
Glasses
Liquor bottles
“Good” glasses
Bayberry candles – Maryann
Wrapped Christmas presents
Unwrapped Christmas presents
Wrapped presents – Bronwen and Kelley
Suitcase – Kelley

ACT TWO:

Scene 1

Glasses with liquor – Harriet, Adele, Bronwen

Scene 2

Crumpled wrapping paper
Unwrapped gifts
Wastebasket
Photo album
Coffee cups
Wrapped gift, small – Charlotte
Suitcase – Kelley

RUBY CHRISTMAS

The action takes place in the living room of the Sibley home in Mason, Pennsylvania.

The time is the present, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

ACT ONE:

Christmas Eve, late afternoon.

ACT TWO:

Scene 1. Later that evening.

Scene 2. Christmas morning.

Act One

SCENE: The Sibley living room, Christmas Eve, the present.

UC a fireplace, clean and never used, dominated by the portrait of a late-middle-aged, humorless-looking businessman. L of fireplace, a telephone stand. UL a door leading to the dining room and basement/family room. DL a door to the hall. UR a window. DR the front door. The mantel is decorated for Christmas, and a lighted tree with presents stands by the window. From offstage comes the drone of a professional football game.

Harriet Sibley and Charlotte Lansing are onstage, having a drink together. Both are in their mid-sixties. Harriet is high-strung and wears a bit too much jewelry. Charlotte is expensively dressed and has the smug assurance of a woman who is seldom contradicted.

(Harriet places the telephone receiver on the stand and calls through the dining room/basement door)

HARRIET Frank. (No answer) Frank! Frank! (Her voice grows strident with annoyance) Frank! Pick up the extension. The *telephone*. (Waits for him to answer, hangs up) Honestly, I could kill Tom and Lorraine for giving him that thing.

CHARLOTTE What thing?

HARRIET One of those video recorders. And the tapes of all the Super Bowl games. The damn thing's been going all day.

CHARLOTTE Well, Frank loves his games.

HARRIET It drives me to distraction. Baseball, football, hockey. I could be murdered in my own living room and he wouldn't notice until he got hungry.

CHARLOTTE Harriet. Is Bronwen coming for the party?

HARRIET It depends on how busy they are at the Institute.

CHARLOTTE Certainly your own daughter won't miss your fortieth anniversary, even if she doesn't care about Christmas.

HARRIET Woods Hole is a large place. They have to co-ordinate schedules.

CHARLOTTE I don't know how long it's been since she's deigned to visit Mason. Bronwen always does exactly as she wants, doesn't she?

HARRIET She's a grown woman.

CHARLOTTE You indulge that girl, Harriet. You always have. Your mistake was in sending her to college. Lanse always says education ruins a woman. He wouldn't hear of our Claudia going.

HARRIET Bronwen wanted to go.

CHARLOTTE Well, so did Claudia. You know how they are at that age. If one does it, they *all* have to do it.

HARRIET Bronwen wasn't like that.

CHARLOTTE God knows *that's* true. Odd man out, that one. I remember when she and Claudia went to summer camp together. Bronwen spent the entire two months skulking about the woods like something out of a horror movie.

HARRIET She was homesick.

CHARLOTTE Mama's girl. But you have only yourself to blame, Harriet. You should have made her go back until she adjusted.

HARRIET After the second year it didn't seem worth the agony for either of us.

CHARLOTTE Children are like horses, as Lanse says. You have to break them to harness. But you let her run rough-shod over you. Well, you see where *college* got you.

HARRIET I wanted Bronwen to have opportunities I didn't have. I didn't want her stuck here in Mason.

CHARLOTTE It's better than that little coal town *you* came from.

HARRIET I know what can happen to women in small towns. They spend their lives catering to their parents, and when they're finally free they're too old or too afraid to get out.

CHARLOTTE Woods Hole. What kind of man is she going to meet in that place?

HARRIET I hear they employ an occasional scientist.

CHARLOTTE Some balding intellectual with ragged sleeves and glasses like milk bottles.

HARRIET Bronwen's a scientist, and she's neither balding nor going blind. Her sleeves are her own business.

CHARLOTTE Here's to the next Madame Curie. (Drains her glass)

HARRIET I made my bed, Charlotte. I'll lie in it. Sweeten your drink? (Takes Charlotte's glass)

CHARLOTTE What did you do with those nice highball glasses I gave you?

HARRIET Oh . . . I keep them for special occasions. I'd hate to break one.

CHARLOTTE You could always call down to Hutzler's and have them send you another. They're open stock.

HARRIET (Gets one of Charlotte's glasses out of the liquor cabinet and makes Charlotte's drink in it) Charlotte, did you ever regret not letting Claudia go to college?

CHARLOTTE Harriet, that is the meanest, most contemptible thing you've ever said.

HARRIET I didn't mean . . .

CHARLOTTE But you always *say*.

HARRIET I was only thinking, if I lost Bronwen . . . One makes mistakes. One has regrets.

CHARLOTTE Claudia was my pal. We never had a moment's unpleasantness with her. (Sighs) Only the good die young, they say.

HARRIET You know where that leaves *us*.

CHARLOTTE Eleven years, and it seems like yesterday. They said the patch of ice on the highway was no more than a yard long. How fragile life is. Count your blessings, Harriet.

HARRIET I do, daily. (A blare of crowd noises from offstage) Frank! Would you turn that down? Frank! (To Charlotte) When the Orioles are playing on the west coast, he has the radio blaring until two A.M. It's a wonder the neighbors don't call the police. God help us if there's ever a franchise in Honolulu.

CHARLOTTE Really, Harriet, you should consider yourself lucky. There are plenty of women in this town who'd be grateful to have a husband in his own bed, sober, every night.

HARRIET I'm sure you're right, but sometimes I wish he'd taken a more lively mistress.

CHARLOTTE How about your friend Margaret? *She's* always available to the highest bidder.

HARRIET That leaves Frank out. He'd squeeze a nickel until it screams.

CHARLOTTE I suppose she'll put in her usual devastating appearance at your party.

HARRIET She's invited, of course. Margaret and George lived next door to us for thirty-five years. Our children grew up together. I can hardly . . .

CHARLOTTE *George* is a darling. But frankly, Harriet, sometimes I wish Lanse would fire him and we'd be rid of the whole lot. God only knows how Margaret does it, at *her* age.

HARRIET Geritol.

CHARLOTTE It's all make-up. Without her make-up she's the Picture of Dorian Gray.

HARRIET Aren't we all?

CHARLOTTE There's nothing wrong with you that a decent hair-do wouldn't fix. Wherever did you get that monstrosity?

HARRIET From Diane, over on Elm Street.

CHARLOTTE No wonder it looks like a do-it-yourself. You come with me next time I have an appointment with Frederick. He's an incurable fairy, but he does wonders with difficult faces.

HARRIET I just can't get used to the idea of driving all the way to Baltimore to have my hair done.

CHARLOTTE (Laughs) You can take the girl out of the mines, but you can't take the mines out of the girl.

MARYANN (Offstage) Harriet?

CHARLOTTE What's *she* doing here?

(Maryann enters. She is about 30, Margaret's daughter and Charlotte's about-to-be-ex-daughter-in-law. She's not impressed by Charlotte)

MARYANN (Entering) Here you are. I can't stay, just wanted to drop off your candles. Hello, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE Maryann. How's Margaret these days?

MARYANN Mother's fine. How's my ex?

CHARLOTTE My son's doing beautifully, thank you.

MARYANN Yes, he always did beautifully at being your son.

HARRIET (Quickly) Is Adele with you?

MARYANN She and Mother are still going at it. You know how they are, solving the world's problems.

HARRIET Well, someone can pick her up later. Can I get you anything? A glass of sherry?

MARYANN I left the motor running. I'll see you tomorrow when I collect the children, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE I don't know why you can't wait until after church.

MARYANN You know why.

CHARLOTTE It wouldn't hurt them. It's only religion.

MARYANN We've plowed this field before, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE I don't want my grandchildren to grow up atheists.

MARYANN And I don't want my *children* to grow up self-righteous.

CHARLOTTE In the long run, you may not have much to say about it.

MARYANN I may not.

CHARLOTTE Please try to be on time for a change.

MARYANN I wouldn't dream of disrupting your Christmas. (To Harriet) What's the word from Bronwen?

HARRIET I haven't heard yet.

MARYANN If she's coming, I hope she gets an early start. They say we're going to have a white Christmas. Isn't that nauseating?

CHARLOTTE I think snow would be lovely.

MARYANN But *you* have a houseboy to shovel it. Call you in the morning, Harriet. Mother says to let her know if you need any help with the party.

HARRIET Thank you.

MARYANN See you in court, Charlotte. Happy holly. (Exits)

CHARLOTTE Well! If I'd known *she* was coming, I'd have baked a cake.

HARRIET Margaret always gives me bayberry candles on Christmas Eve. But I assumed, what with Maryann and David's separation . . .

CHARLOTTE Divorce, Harriet. There *will* be a divorce. The little tart. Every time she calls me "Charlotte" I want to cut out her tongue.

HARRIET Well, you *are* her mother-in-law, at least for now. "Mrs. Lansing" hardly seems appropriate. And, under the circumstances, I don't think "Mommy" . . .

CHARLOTTE "Mommy!" God help me! So your old pal Adele's here, too.

HARRIET She got in this morning.

CHARLOTTE I don't know why I have to be the last to hear everything. If the town burns down, I hope someone will have the courtesy to let me know.

HARRIET I'd have called you, Charlotte, but I've been in such a tizzy . . .

CHARLOTTE Of course you have. You *did* tell the Country Club not to serve those ghastly cold hors d'oeuvres, didn't you?

HARRIET I told them. Charlotte, I hope it won't be awkward for you, Margaret being there. After all . . .

CHARLOTTE After all, you can hardly overlook someone who gives you bayberry candles every Christmas Eve.

HARRIET When they divorce, will David want custody?

CHARLOTTE Honestly, Harriet, have you taken leave of your senses? Do you think I'd have *my* grandchildren brought up in that household? Margaret springing from bed to bed like a toad in heat. And God knows what Maryann's found to warm *her* tootsies on cold winter nights. If you want *my* opinion, she's over-fucked and under-fed.

HARRIET (Amused) Really, Charlotte, such language!

CHARLOTTE Well, they make me so mad I could pee B-Bs. You're lucky Tom married a nice girl like Lorraine. Isn't it time you had grandchildren?

HARRIET That's up to the kids.

CHARLOTTE Anything on the horizon?

HARRIET Not that I can tell.

CHARLOTTE Better put that on your list for Santa next year.

HARRIET I can already see what next Christmas is going to bring. The tapes of all the World Series.

CHARLOTTE Don't go pinning your hopes on Bronwen. By the time *she* gets around to procreating, they'll be born without legs, and retarded.

HARRIET Charlotte!

CHARLOTTE Oh, you have no sense of humor.

HARRIET Neither does Frank. That's why he married me. We've had forty wonderfully stodgy years together.

CHARLOTTE You don't appreciate Frank enough.

HARRIET I appreciate him, but he's so predictable.

CHARLOTTE For forty years, stodgy or not, you've never had to worry about where the next meal's coming from.

HARRIET I know where it's coming from. I have to cook it.

CHARLOTTE Get help. You can afford it.

HARRIET You know how Frank is about food.

CHARLOTTE He's given you security and respectability. What more do you want?

HARRIET Cheap thrills.

CHARLOTTE Good heavens, look at the time. I really must go. We're taking the grandchildren to the candlelight service, and I have to give Lanse his bath.

HARRIET Give Lanse his bath?

CHARLOTTE He loves me to scrub him down. Isn't he a silly thing? (Harriet gets Charlotte's coat and holds it for her) If Bronwen comes, have her drop out and see me. All of Claudia's old friends stop by on Christmas morning. It's such a comfort.

HARRIET Aren't you making calls this year?

CHARLOTTE Oh, you'll be busy with the party.

HARRIET Not too busy to see you, Charlotte. It wouldn't be Christmas without you.

CHARLOTTE Then I'll be here. You know, Harriet, sometimes I think Bronwen doesn't like me. She never has much to say.

HARRIET That's only her way. She isn't demonstrative.

CHARLOTTE Well, you'd think she could stir her stumps a little for her mother's dearest friend.

HARRIET Bronwen's crazy about you, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE I suppose. I still think that chair would look better over by the fireplace. Good night, Harriet. (Exits)

(Harriet flits around, straightening things that don't need straightening. Lorraine enters from basement. She is in her mid-twenties. She and Harriet are fond of each other)

LORRAINE My God, I don't think I can take another bone-crushing tackle. Do you know, I've just seen 27 consecutive "greatest plays in the history of the Super Bowl"? And we're only up to 1970. Did Mrs. Lansing leave?

HARRIET Sometimes that woman jars my preserves. One of these days I'm going to say something I'll regret for the rest of my life.

LORRAINE What did she want?

HARRIET Batting practice. I'm surprised she doesn't have calluses on her nose. She's always sticking it where it doesn't belong.

LORRAINE Really, Harriet . . .

HARRIET (Laughs) She *still* has a burr under her saddle about Margaret. After all these years. And when her precious *son* up and married Margaret's *daughter* . . . It's enough to make you believe in God.

LORRAINE What does she have against Margaret?

HARRIET Margaret took this town by storm. When she walked into a room, the men flocked to her like ants to spilled sugar. Charlotte was so jealous she saw everything in shades of green. It wasn't long before it was common knowledge that any man who paid attention to Margaret was on a dead-end street. At least if he worked for Lansing Jute.

LORRAINE How have you managed to be friends with both of them?

HARRIET The way porcupines make love—carefully. (Laughs) Welcome to corporate life, Lorraine. Be glad Tom's still below the executive level. Once the promotions start, your carefree days are over.

LORRAINE I always thought I had it hard, working my way through business school. Now I'm beginning to think I've led a sheltered life.

HARRIET Charlotte likes you. That's a help. Not that she'll ever let you forget your humble beginnings. Do the men want anything?

LORRAINE They'll live. Listen, Harriet, I hope you don't hate us for giving that Betamax to Frank. I really didn't want to, but Tom insisted.

HARRIET Of course I don't mind. It's obviously a big hit.

LORRAINE Yeah, but I wasn't so sure it'd be a big hit with you.

HARRIET That's very thoughtful of you, Lorraine.

LORRAINE Can I help you with anything?

HARRIET I have to set the table and get dinner on. Some last minute wrapping. Adele needs to be picked up at Margaret's. Perhaps you could do that.

LORRAINE I'll see if Tom or Frank will go, and give you a hand here.

HARRIET Better not disturb them. They're enjoying themselves.

LORRAINE I don't know, Harriet. Every time we come here you spoil Tom so, I have to nag for a week just to get him to take out the garbage.

HARRIET When I married Frank his mother had *him* so spoiled he'd lie on the couch after dinner waiting for his dessert to be brought to him. Taking out the garbage is a big step forward. (Laughs) Frank's impossible about his mother. He won't eat anything she didn't serve—and believe me she was no gourmet. Meat and potatoes, meat and potatoes. Nothing new, nothing fancy. And he'd choke on his tongue before he'd compliment you. If I ask him how it is, he pulls a long face and says, "It's all right, but it's not the way my mother used to make it."

LORRAINE How do you stand it?

HARRIET Men are such babies, aren't they?

LORRAINE Harriet, sometimes I think I don't understand marriage.

HARRIET Lord, who does (Sighs) I wanted to be married on Christmas Eve, but you can't get a preacher in this town on Christmas Eve. Frank insisted we wait until the day after Christmas. He thought it would be blasphemy to be married on Christmas Day. Charlotte arranged the wedding.

LORRAINE I didn't know. How very strange.

HARRIET The Lansings have always taken Frank under their wing. Lanse's father gave him his first job, after he flunked out of William and Mary.

LORRAINE Tom says he had pneumonia.

HARRIET Yes. He's worked for the Lansings ever since. He was general manager of the factory when I met him.

LORRAINE But didn't you mind? Your own wedding?

HARRIET Well, the Lansings footed the bill. And my mother was dead, and I still had my nursing job in New York. Better Charlotte than Old Lady Sibley. She had as much taste as one of her own pot roasts. The church was packed, though half the people there were merely curious. They expected me to have two heads. We held the reception in Lanse's mother's house. Adele came down to be maid of honor. (Pause) It was a lovely wedding.

LORRAINE It must have been.

HARRIET No more so than yours and Tom's, of course. Nowadays, I suppose we could all go out in the woods and chant a few lines of poetry and that'd be it.

LORRAINE Tom puzzles me sometimes, Harriet.

HARRIET Any woman who says she understands men is either a fool or a liar. And vice versa. That's why friends are so important. Back when all the company executives lived on this street, we wives were together every afternoon. Oh, how we used to dread the weekends.

LORRAINE Why?

HARRIET Because the men would be home all day.

LORRAINE Harriet, I don't know if I want . . .

HARRIET Of course you do. You'll get used to it. You haven't been married all that long.

LORRAINE Two and a half years.

HARRIET And there will be children. You'll see, the years will fly by before you know it.

LORRAINE I suppose so.

HARRIET I'm fond of you, Lorraine.

LORRAINE Thank you. I'm fond of you, too.

HARRIET The old saying was right. When Tom married you I didn't lose a son, I gained a daughter.

LORRAINE Even if I'm not *really* family?

HARRIET Well, neither am I. You have to be *born* a Sibley around here.

LORRAINE They still don't accept you? After forty years?

HARRIET Once an outsider, always an outsider. You watch at the next family dinner. They treat me exactly the way they do you. Like an exchange student from Siberia. My *God*, aren't those dinners deadly?

LORRAINE And they have so many of them.

HARRIET Sibleys. When Frank's mother was alive she used to come here every Tuesday night for dinner. And every Wednesday we went there. I thought I'd lose my mind. God forgive me, but the day they put that old lady in the ground was a day I'll never forget. It was all I could do not to break out the champagne right there at the graveside.

LORRAINE I don't know how you put up with her.

HARRIET You can put up with anything if you have to. But it taught me one thing, not to meddle in my son's marriage.

LORRAINE You never have. Did you hear from Bronwen yet?

HARRIET (Abruptly) No.

LORRAINE I'm sure she'll be here.

HARRIET It's getting late. You'd better get on over to Margaret's. Give her my love. (Exits to dining room)

LORRAINE (Puzzled) Yeah, okay.

(Lorraine looks after Harriet for a second, shrugs, and exits to hallway. The TV blares. Bronwen and Kelley enter. Both are in their thirties. Bronwen is apprehensive and strung tight, a powder-keg with a short fuse)

KELLEY (Looks around) So this is it.

BRONWEN This is it.

KELLEY (Studying the portrait) The patriarch? He's not at all what you described.

BRONWEN He's not?

KELLEY Worse. Much worse.

BRONWEN A man of principle, as you can see.

KELLEY Principle, for sure. I can't wait to meet the real thing.

BRONWEN Be careful. He has a look of disapproval that can shrivel your soul.

KELLEY (Putting their presents under the tree) How did they meet?

BRONWEN Her roommate in nursing school came from around here. She introduced them.

KELLEY (Notices a crudely made ornament on the tree) This is unusual. It has your touch.

BRONWEN I made it in kindergarten. She always puts it on the tree. I don't know why. This is one she got on their honeymoon. It was a big occasion. My father's last trip out of Mason.

KELLEY You're kidding.

BRONWEN He hasn't taken a vacation in forty years. If Mother had *her* way, of course, they'd go around the world once a year on the Q.E.II.

KELLEY Did she ever travel alone?

BRONWEN Once in a while she'd sneak me away to the Jersey shore for a weekend. We'd sit on the sand with our feet in the water and look out to the horizon, and she'd tell me about all the places she wanted to visit. But he claimed we didn't have enough money for long trips.

KELLEY Bron, forgive my crass materialism, but your folks aren't exactly standing in line for food stamps.

BRONWEN What can I say? He's a creep.

KELLEY Then he must feel right at home in this town. What in the world is wrong with the trees?

BRONWEN They cut off the limbs. All that's left are trunks and twigs.

KELLEY Whatever for?

BRONWEN Tidier, I guess. God forbid we'd have unruly trees.

KELLEY If they do that to their trees, what do they do to their children?
(Pause) Bron, should we have come here?

BRONWEN We discussed it all before.

KELLEY I know. But, being here . . . There's a smugness about this place. It makes me uneasy.

BRONWEN It's always made me uneasy.

KELLEY Maybe we should have waited until another time. I mean, Christmas, their fortieth anniversary . . .

BRONWEN I had to come. She'd want me. This is . . . was my home (Forced enthusiasm) She'll be glad we came.

KELLEY She may be glad *you* came.

BRONWEN What are we getting uptight about? Mother knows the situation. She's visited us.

KELLEY She stays in motels and we meet in restaurants. She's made her position clear.

BRONWEN She invited us.

KELLEY She invited you.

BRONWEN I know, Kelley. It doesn't make sense. But I wanted so much to be here. And I couldn't do it without you.

KELLEY You're in the wrong kind of work. You should have gone into demolition.

BRONWEN We can always leave.

KELLEY Whenever you say.

BRONWEN It's not fair of me, is it, to do this to you?

KELLEY I don't care about fair.

BRONWEN I mean, Christmas and all . . .

KELLEY Oh, sure. I'm going to die without the foghorns and the sleet pounding at the windows, and all my screaming nephews and nieces. Christmas is where you are, Bron. You know that.

BRONWEN Me, too.

KELLEY I'll get the suitcase. (Hears the TV) Football? On Christmas Eve?

BRONWEN Beats me. He can always find some kind of sports.

KELLEY It's loud enough.

BRONWEN He's hard of hearing.

KELLEY I can't wait for Mass from St. Patrick's.

BRONWEN Kelley! They're Lutheran!

(Kelley exits. Bronwen tosses her coat on the sofa. Harriet enters)

HARRIET Bronwen.

BRONWEN Hello, Mother. (Moves toward her but checks herself)

HARRIET This is a surprise. You were so indefinite, I'd about given up.

BRONWEN I'm sorry. I didn't know until the last minute.

HARRIET You work for yourself, Bronwen. It seems to me you could . . .
Well, you've made it quite clear I'm not to push you. How were the roads?

BRONWEN Not too bad. No snow.

HARRIET We've had a dry fall. The reservoir isn't nearly full. They say we'll have a white Christmas.

BRONWEN How are you?

HARRIET Fine, except for my arthritis. How are you? Though I don't now why I ask. Why shouldn't you be fine?

BRONWEN What does that mean?

HARRIET You do exactly what you want. Why shouldn't you be fine?

BRONWEN Mother . . .

HARRIET Don't pay any attention to me. I'm just nervous.

BRONWEN Sure. (Moves to embrace her. Harriet turns away) Is that a new ring?

HARRIET Your father gave it to me. Rubies, for our fortieth.

BRONWEN That's nice.

HARRIET Your father is very sentimental.

BRONWEN I know. (Pause) Mother, would you be happier if I hadn't come?

HARRIET What a thing to say. Tom and Lorraine are here, and Adele.

BRONWEN Adele? That's terrific.

HARRIET Bronwen, Charlotte will probably drop in tomorrow. (Bronwen makes a face) She comes by every Christmas. You know that.

BRONWEN Probably wants to count the loot.

HARRIET I wish you'd try to make a fuss over her.

BRONWEN Why?

HARRIET She thinks you don't like her.

BRONWEN Age has sharpened her perception.

HARRIET Bronwen.

BRONWEN Sorry.

HARRIET And let her think you're still with the Oceanographic Institute.

BRONWEN But I'm not. Only a few weeks in the spring.

HARRIET Well, she doesn't know that.

BRONWEN Mother, are you ashamed of what I do?

HARRIET Yes, I'm ashamed. It's a ridiculous thing, catching lobsters.

BRONWEN Trapping lobsters.

HARRIET After the education you've had.

BRONWEN You're putting yours to good use.

HARRIET I wasn't lucky enough to go to college. Not everyone is born with money.

BRONWEN You had a profession.

HARRIET You call nursing a profession? Cleaning up other people's messes?

BRONWEN I thought . . . you used to talk as though you liked it.

HARRIET The happiest day of my life was the day I took off that uniform for the last time.

BRONWEN I'm sorry.

HARRIET What?

BRONWEN I'm sorry you had to do something you hated. I was always . . . proud of you.

HARRIET (Softening) And I'm sorry I nagged you. I *am* glad you came. You're just in time for dinner.

BRONWEN (Pause) We ate on the road.

HARRIET We?

BRONWEN Kelley and I.

HARRIET You brought *her* here?

BRONWEN Yes.

HARRIET To *my* anniversary?

BRONWEN Tom brought Lorraine.

HARRIET Don't be disgusting.

BRONWEN Mother, how would you feel if I called your life disgusting? Lots of people live this way, you know.

HARRIET God knows that's true. Every time you turn on the television . . .

BRONWEN Would you like me to leave?

HARRIET It's seldom enough we get to see you. I wouldn't want to miss the golden opportunity. And it would look odd if you weren't here for the party. God knows it's embarrassing when you don't come for Christmas.

BRONWEN Embarrassing.

HARRIET Other daughters have time for *their* mothers.

BRONWEN Mother, why do we always go at each other like this?

(Kelley enters before Harriet can reply. Harriet gives Bronwen a "need you ask?" look and turns to Kelley with a polite smile)

HARRIET Hello, Kelley.

KELLEY (Glances at Bronwen, who is not looking well) Merry Christmas, Mrs. Sibley. Happy Anniversary.

HARRIET Thank you. How are your parents?

KELLEY Fine.

HARRIET They must miss having you with them for Christmas.

KELLEY They understand.

HARRIET How nice. We're having a little pick-up supper. Bronwen said you ate on the road, but you're welcome to join us. I'll tell your father you're here. Frank! (Exits)

KELLEY Your mother is so polite it's rude. You look terrible.

BRONWEN Just like old times. We have it down to an art.

KELLEY Bron, is this really a good idea?

BRONWEN Damn it, this is one of the most important events in her life. I'm her daughter. I have a right to be here. And if Tom can bring Lorraine, I can bring you.

KELLEY This is a hell of a time to fight *that* battle.

BRONWEN She might get to like you.

KELLEY I may have charmed you, pal. But that one's not going to be so easy.

BRONWEN I'm afraid I dragged you into a mess, Kelley.

KELLEY They're your family. The worst I can have is an unpleasant couple of days.

BRONWEN I guess I forgot how it could be.

KELLEY Oh, stop. We just got here. (Takes her hand) Bron, promise me you'll leave if it gets too bad.

BRONWEN I promise.

(Harriet enters to see them holding hands)

HARRIET Bronwen, your father wants to see you.

BRONWEN Here I am.

HARRIET Don't be fresh with me, Bronwen.

BRONWEN All right. (Exits)

HARRIET How was the trip down, Kelley?

KELLEY Not bad.

HARRIET Have you ever been in this part of the country before?

KELLEY Mrs. Sibley, I understand how awkward it is for you to have me here.

HARRIET We're always glad to see Bronwen's friends.

KELLEY You're not glad to see me. I think it'll be easier for us both if we're honest about it.

HARRIET Why did you come?

KELLEY Because Bron wanted to be here. And she was so frightened.

HARRIET Frightened, of her own family? Really!

KELLEY Frightened of your disapproval. You *do* disapprove of her, Mrs. Sibley.

HARRIET Frankly, Kelley, I don't think it's any of your business.

KELLEY I want to make it as easy for her as I can.

HARRIET It would have been easier for us all if you'd stayed away.

KELLEY Not for her.

HARRIET Well, you're here. I suppose we might as well make the best of it.

KELLEY I know Bron can be her own worst enemy, so if there's any way I can help . . .

HARRIET As a matter of fact, you can do me a favor.

KELLEY I'll try.

HARRIET You know how stubborn she can be. Maybe you can convince her to let people think she's still with Woods Hole.

KELLEY I don't know how I can do that.

HARRIET For two days? Surely it can't be all that important.

KELLEY Her work means a lot to her.

HARRIET Oh, Kelley, even you can see how asinine that is.

KELLEY It isn't easy work.

HARRIET She had such a good job at the Institute. They only hired two from Cornell that year. People around here would never understand how she could give that up.

KELLEY I'm sorry, I can't do it.

HARRIET Won't, you mean.

KELLEY All right, then, won't. There are things about her work that terrify me. The sea. The tides. The storms. The average life-span for lobstermen is forty-five years. If the sea doesn't kill you, skin cancer does. Some evenings she falls asleep before dinner. I'm afraid for her. Most of the time. But if you could see the look on her face when she comes chugging up to the dock at sunset, tired and dirty, her hair blowing in her eyes . . . I don't think you'd have the heart to ask her to quit.

HARRIET I would.

KELLEY She sings. On the boat, in the shower, while she's half-dead from exhaustion and still hauling crates of lobsters around. Have you ever heard her sing, Mrs. Sibley?

HARRIET No.

KELLEY Neither had I, until she quit the Institute and got that boat. I loved her for three years before I ever heard her sing. She can't carry a tune in a basket, but there's nothing so beautiful to me as the sound of Bronwen singing. So you have to understand, Mrs. Sibley. There's no way I could ask Bronwen to lie about what she does. It would be like asking her to cut off her hand.

HARRIET I should have known you'd side with her.

KELLEY She needs your approval terribly.

HARRIET She has a funny way of showing it.

KELLEY You're very much alike. (Pause) She loves you. She didn't come here to hurt you. She came because she wants to please you.

HARRIET To please me?

KELLEY I know she went about it wrong, bringing me. But why would she come, if not to please you? Mrs. Sibley, won't you give her a chance?

HARRIET (Softening) You're very persuasive, Kelley.

KELLEY (Laughs) I have to be, living with her. As you might have noticed, Bronwen has a mind of her own.

HARRIET (Laughs) Dear Lord, doesn't she? Even as a child. She was a beautiful child.

KELLEY She's a beautiful woman.

HARRIET I have some wonderful baby pictures. Would you like to see them?

KELLEY Very much.

HARRIET We were always up to something. We'd play tricks on Frank. He's very proper, you know. He even wears a coat and tie to the dinner table. We'd put those little suction cups on his coffee cup. When he picked it up the saucer would come with it. It would make a terrible mess. He's be furious. "God damn it, Harriet, that's not funny." We'd try to look contrite, and kick each other under the table. You could tell he wanted to give her a good swat, but he knew I'd kill him if he did.

BRONWEN (Entering) Well, I saw him.

HARRIET What did he say?

BRONWEN I think he recognzied me. I caught a faint flicker of the eyelids.

HARRIET (Amused) Bronwen, really . . .

BRONWEN Tom gave him that thing, didn't he?

HARRIET Your father's crazy about it.

BRONWEN Now he doesn't have to talk to you *between* seasons.

HARRIET He talks to me.

BRONWEN My father doesn't talk. My father makes pronouncements.

KELLEY Bron . . .

BRONWEN Sometimes he grunts, but it's hard to know what he means by it.

KELLEY Quit while you're ahead, Bron.

HARRIET Don't talk about your father that way.

BRONWEN When was the last time you had a conversation with him? The last one I had was in 1960. It was about the World Series.

KELLEY Bron, dear, shut up.

BRONWEN I'm sorry.

HARRIET It isn't his fault. He's hard of hearing.

BRONWEN Of course.

HARRIET We have lots of long talks when you're not here.

BRONWEN (Flaring up) What about when Tom's here? Do you have nice long talks when he's here?

HARRIET I have to get dinner on. You're welcome to join us if you like.

BRONWEN I'd better not. It might render conversation impossible.

HARRIET Won't you try being pleasant for a change? (Exits)

BRONWEN (Mutters) Why don't you trade me in on a new model?

KELLEY (Touches her) Relax, will you?

BRONWEN It's all right for *her* to say things about him. But God help me if *I* do.

KELLEY It's human nature. I can complain about you, but let anyone else say a word and I'll scratch their eyes out.

BRONWEN It isn't true, what she said. He doesn't talk to her. She used to carry on about it all the time. How can you have a conversation with someone who doesn't hear?

KELLEY Has he always been like that?

BRONWEN As long as I can remember. He's tried a dozen kinds of hearing aids. It must be the most underdeveloped branch of medical technology around. (Pause) I don't understand it. We used to have such good times together.

KELLEY That's what she said, too.

BRONWEN She said that? To you?

KELLEY Just before your unfortunate entrance.

BRONWEN I don't know what happens to me around her.

KELLEY The visit isn't over yet.

BRONWEN Sure. Maybe we can find some *new* ways to hurt each other.

KELLEY Stop that.

BRONWEN You know, when I was a little kid, she'd pick me up and swing me around and sit me down on the counter in the kitchen while she cooked. She'd look over at me, and there'd be such . . . joy in that look. But something changed over the years. It wasn't anything I did. Something changed in her. One day I caught her watching me. The way she stared . . . it was as though she . . . wanted to kill me.

KELLEY Bronwen.

BRONWEN Then I noticed other things. She didn't like people anymore. She had always liked people before. Elevator operators, clerks in stores—everywhere she went she'd talk to people, and remember things about them. There were always two or three neighbors dropping in, just hanging around the kitchen. (Pause) Something had been happening to her, and I didn't know it until that day.

KELLEY Makes us a drink, Bron.

(Bronwen crosses to the bar as Lorraine enter)

LORRAINE Bronwen! (Embraces her) I'm so glad you could make it.

BRONWEN Wild horses couldn't have kept me away. This is my friend, Kelley. My sister-in-law, Lorraine.

LORRAINE Have you seen The Thing?

BRONWEN My father? Briefly.

LORRAINE No, silly. The Betamax.

BRONWEN Was that your contribution?

LORRAINE Unwilling. I did my best to talk Tom out of it. But you know how he is. Once he gets an idea it'd take brain surgery to remove it. (To Kelley) Do you work with Bronwen?

KELLEY I run the restaurant.

LORRAINE Good for you. You don't have to handle the creepy-crawlies.

BRONWEN Lorraine's term of endearment for my lobsters.

LORRAINE Pour me one, too, will you, Bron? Really, they *are* disgusting. All those moving parts.

BRONWEN Have you ever glanced into a pot of fish chowder?

LORRAINE No, why?

BRONWEN Heads. With eyes.

LORRAINE Good heavens!

KELLEY Bron, I don't think the public's ready to know the truth about everything.

LORRAINE Whatever made you decide to go into the restaurant business?

KELLEY My parents ran one. Outside of Kittery, Maine. When I graduated from Boston College, I couldn't think of anything else so wonderfully masochistic to do. Not with a major in Sociology.

BRONWEN Besides, after all those years in Parochial school, she was an authority on fish.

KELLEY Tacky.

BRONWEN We know you people want to take over the world by sheer force of reproduction. That's why we don't allow Catholics in Mason.

LORRAINE We don't allow Jews, either.

BRONWEN You're forgetting the Gellers. Of course, they joined the Lutheran Church.

LORRAINE Now they're known as "the Jews that joined the Lutheran Church." (To Kelley) Do you ever go out on the boat?

KELLEY Not at this time of year. I'm a coward.

LORRAINE (To Bronwen) I'd think your fingers would fall off.

BRONWEN Every time I feel cold I think of Kelley back at the restaurant, boiling the old fish-heads. Warms me right up.

LORRAINE Seriously, isn't it dangerous?

KELLEY Yes, it's dangerous. Two winters ago she got caught in a nor'easter. It took the Coast Guard six hours to find her.

LORRAINE Weren't you frightened?

BRONWEN Not as much as Kelley. I knew what was happening. She only had her imagination, which is vivid at times.

LORRAINE (To Kelley) I'd be tempted to protest.

KELLEY Fat lot of good it would do me.

BRONWEN Besides, if I quit what would you have to gripe about?

KELLEY I'd find something.

LORRAINE Do you two live together?

KELLEY We have an apartment over the restaurant, overlooking the harbor.

LORRAINE How long have you been together?

BRONWEN Six years.

LORRAINE Is it hard?

BRONWEN We've had our ups and downs.

KELLEY Living with someone takes a lot of work.

BRONWEN And a lot of talking. If we could sell our conversations by the pound, we'd be rich. How's Baby Brother?

LORRAINE Well, difficult at times.

BRONWEN Life with Sibley males is a constant round of adjustments. (Pause) Is something troubling you, Lorraine?

LORRAINE Sort of. Oh, it's nothing important. Tom's a good man.

BRONWEN God protect me from "good" men. I was raised by one.

LORRAINE It isn't that we argue. Maybe it would help if we did. That would be *something*, at least. Before we were married we shared a lot. At least I thought we did. But he doesn't seem interested anymore. I used to think marriage would be Real Life. All the rest was only preliminaries.

BRONWEN It's Real Life, all right.

LORRAINE Well, it feels sort of—empty. Oh, I'm not expressing it well.

BRONWEN Is there anything I can do?

LORRAINE You're probably right. It's a matter of adjustment.

BRONWEN Maybe. Lorraine, I don't know Tom very well. He was my father's son. I was my mother's daughter. We never had much in common. (Pause) I wish I could be more help. If you ever need to get away for a while, to sort things out, I hope you'll come and stay with us.

LORRAINE Thank you.

KELLEY That goes for me, too.

LORRAINE I know you're busy.

BRONWEN Not that busy. We'll put you to work.

LORRAINE I'm not sure I could handle it.

BRONWEN You could handle it.

LORRAINE From what Harriet says . . .

BRONWEN To hear her tell it, it's like sweeping up after a circus parade.

KELLEY Really, Bron.

BRONWEN Not her idea of "proper."

KELLEY What is?

BRONWEN Housewifery, motherhood, and petit point. In that order.

LORRAINE She's not that quaint.

KELLEY Bronwen has a brittle sense of humor. It comes from handling lobsters.

BRONWEN No, lobstermen.

LORRAINE Do they give you a hard time?

BRONWEN They did at first. It's getting better.

LORRAINE Why do you do it?

BRONWEN I like the hard work. And the sea. And feeling the changing seasons in the air. When the sea is calm I like to cut the motor and drift, and hear the boat creak with the swells. It's like an old house, only small and cozy. I lie on the deck, with nothing around me but the water, and the sky so far away. And after a while nothing matters but the warm sun, and the sound of the waves slapping the hull . . .

HARRIET (Entering) Dinner's on. Is Adele here?

LORRAINE Paying her respects to the NFL.

HARRIET Bronwen, while we're eating you'd better call the motel and get a room for Kelley. It shouldn't be difficult. No one travels on Christmas Eve.

BRONWEN (Stunned) Mother, are you saying what I think you're saying?

HARRIET It'll work out better all around.

BRONWEN Mother . . .

LORRAINE I'll call the folks. Want to meet the crowd, Kelley?

KELLEY Bron?

HARRIET Does she need your permission?

KELLEY No, Mrs. Sibley, I don't need her permission. But I know what's about to happen, and I intend to stay if she wants me.

BRONWEN (Furious) Go on, Kelley.

LORRAINE Let's see if they notice us.

(Lorraine and Kelley exit)

BRONWEN (Exploding) That was the rudest thing you've ever done.

HARRIET I don't like that girl.

BRONWEN I don't give a damn.

HARRIET Whatever possessed you, bringing her here? Your father is very upset. He believes Christmas is for family.

BRONWEN His generosity overwhelms me. If you want us to leave, Mother, we'll leave. But if we stay we stay together. It's up to you.

HARRIET You never visit us alone.

BRONWEN It isn't very pleasant.

HARRIET I don't know what I did to make you hate me.

BRONWEN I know what I did to make you hate *me*. I'm a lesbian.

HARRIET Don't say that word in my house.

BRONWEN (Shouts) Lesbian, dyke, queer!

HARRIET Stop that! Your father will hear.

BRONWEN Since when?

HARRIET He hears everything. He doesn't admit it, but he does.

(They stare at each other for a moment in shock)

BRONWEN Mother . . .

HARRIET I didn't mean that.

BRONWEN Mother . . .

HARRIET I only said it because you make me nervous.

BRONWEN It's true, isn't it?

HARRIET No matter what I say to you, there's always an argument.

LORRAINE (Entering) The troops are assembled. Frank's going to ask the blessing.

BRONWEN (Disgusted) Oh, God.

LORRAINE I believe he had something a little more elaborate in mind.

HARRIET Are you coming, Bronwen?

BRONWEN I think I'll stay here and make a few obscene phone calls.

(Harriet gives her a disgusted look and exits in a huff, with Lorraine. Adele enters. She is Harriet's oldest friend, in her sixties, and has always been sure enough of herself to be forthright)

BRONWEN Adele! (Embraces her) God, I'm glad you're here.

ADELE How's it going?

BRONWEN Rotten.

ADELE I thought so. The look on Harriet's face just curdled the cream.

BRONWEN Oh, it's good to see you again.

ADELE Same here. It's been too long. It's always too long. You two at it already?

BRONWEN Into Round Three, at least.

ADELE Never a dull moment around here. You're looking well.

BRONWEN So are you.

ADELE Barring your perpetual air of hometown strain, of course.

BRONWEN How are your offspring?

ADELE Unremarkable.

BRONWEN I'm surprised you're not spending Christmas with them. Oh, God, she's got *me* doing it.

ADELE They can do their own baby-sitting for once. Grandma wants a change of scenery. I notice you brought Kelley. You always did like to stack the deck against yourself.

BRONWEN Do you think it was the wrong thing to do? Seeing that it's such a Goddamned *family* event?

ADELE Now here's an interesting dilemma. Do I say "no," thereby incurring the disfavor of my lifelong friend? Or do I say "yes," and risk death at the hands of one of my favorite people?

BRONWEN I withdraw the question.

ADELE However, just between you and me—quote me and I'll swear on my mother's grave you're lying—just between you and me, I'm glad.

BRONWEN *Glad!*

ADELE I don't know what your reasons were, but it might give your mother the good kick in the pants she needs.

BRONWEN What do you mean?

ADELE She's dug herself into a well-furnished foxhole she calls security, and reinforced it with every prejudice and narrow-minded attitude this town feeds on. Remember those bomb shelters everyone was building back in the fifties?

BRONWEN Vaguely.

ADELE That's what this town is, a Nieman-Marcus bomb shelter. Here they sit, counting their treasures and ducking every time a new idea flies over. When a liberal hits town, they sound the air raid sirens.

BRONWEN You should have been a poet, Adele.

ADELE (Sighs) I had aspirations once, in my callow youth. Did you know your mother wanted to go on the stage?

BRONWEN I had no idea.

ADELE We pretended we weren't serious, of course. But deep down inside we longed. Oh, how we longed. Tomorrow we'd do it, always tomorrow. As soon as the depression ended. But then there was the war, and after the war all we wanted were the tree-lined streets and backyard barbecues. So we whiled away the afternoons drinking gin and playing canasta and comparing our children's shoe sizes, and then their bra sizes, and then the sizes of their husbands' bank accounts. And here we are.

BRONWEN She wanted to be an actress?

ADELE When we lived in New York, before she married your father. She dragged me to every Saturday matinee she could find. We'd scrape together enough money for a standing room ticket, and maybe a container of orange drink. I swear she ruined my arches, making me stand through all those matinees.

BRONWEN Adele, what happened to her?

ADELE This town. It's a vampire, this town. It sneaks into your room through the darkness and slowly, quietly sucks the life from you. And in the morning you don't remember what happened, except maybe you had a strange dream. But little by little you grow tireder and weaker, until one day there's nothing left but a dry husk. And then you start to suck the life from someone else. And when everyone in the town has sucked the life from everyone else, they go out and marry strangers and bring them to the town, and they have children, and for a while there's more blood to suck.

BRONWEN Good God, Adele!

ADELE Metaphorically speaking, of course.

BRONWEN You really hate this place.

ADELE It's killing my best friend. McKeesport may be sooty and chaotic, and our rich are too rich and our poor too poor and our taxes too high. But at least we don't eat our young. What do you say we put in an appearance in the dining room?

BRONWEN You've got to be kidding. I may never eat again.

ADELE It would mean a lot to your mother. (Bronwen gives her a disbelieving look) I know, she'd have her jaw cemented shut before she'd say so, but it would.

(They exit. Blackout)

END OF ACT ONE

Act Two

SCENE 1: Later that evening. The Betamax is blaring. Bronwen, Adele, and Harriet are having an after-dinner drink.

BRONWEN I'm stuffed. I made a pig of myself and I didn't even think I was hungry.

HARRIET "It was all right . . ."

BRONWEN ". . . but it's not the way my mother used to make it."

ADELE Harriet was always a good cook. She could do wonders with a can of macaroni and cheese and a hot-plate. Remember when we lived in that little walk-up on the Upper West Side? Five of us crammed in three rooms, no stove, and ten minutes of hot water twice a day.

HARRIET We had to pay extra for the hot water. We used to shower at the hospital.

ADELE We couldn't wait for it to be your week to cook.

HARRIET You didn't wait. You changed the schedule when I wasn't looking. You never caught onto my secret, did you?

ADELE You never let us in the kitchen.

HARRIET Brandy.

BRONWEN Brandy? In macaroni and cheese?

HARRIET Brandy, *then* macaroni and cheese. I'd give them a little nip before dinner, pretend to be doing something elaborate in the kitchen, and keep refilling their glasses. By the time they got to the table they wouldn't have noticed if I hadn't bothered to heat it.

ADELE I always wondered why we didn't get much studying done.

BRONWEN Well, I'm sober, and I still think it was a fabulous dinner. You should come work for Kelley, Mom. She could use you.

HARRIET I don't know. After forty years of meat and potatoes . . .

BRONWEN What do you think those fusty old Yankees eat? Meat and potatoes. Nowadays, we have to throw in a salad bar, of course.

HARRIET A couple of months ago we went to the Country Club for dinner with George and Margaret. Margaret was loaded to the gills, or *got* loaded to the gills. And when it came time to go to the salad bar . . . George wanted her to stay at the table, but she wouldn't hear of it. She got herself a pile of lettuce as big as a basketball, loaded it down with everything they had, poured on a quart of dressing . . . Really, it was repulsive. Then she marched out into the middle of the room, held it up in both hands, and shouted, "Life is a salad bar, and we're nothing but the Bac-O-Bits."

ADELE (As they laugh) Poor George.

HARRIET Poor George, my foot. He has so much money he could buy the whole Country Club. But he can't buy Margaret's good behavior. He got her out of there so fast the dust hasn't settled yet.

ADELE What did Frank say?

HARRIET Humph.

BRONWEN Mom, what's going to happen to Margaret?

HARRIET I wish I knew. When she's drinking I'm terrified she'll run her car into a tree, or burn the house down with a cigarette. George had her driver's license taken away. He left her with a car and keys.

BRONWEN Uh-huh.

HARRIET Now that Maryann's having her trouble, of course, Margaret's all right. She can always pull herself together when she's needed. (To Adele) Anything new out there?

ADELE Maryann's been getting anonymous phone calls. Nothing exciting, just heavy breathing.

BRONWEN It's probably David.

HARRIET Bronwen!

BRONWEN He's too pale and smooth. Reminds me of one of those bank manager types that sniff women's underwear on the side.

HARRIET (Amused) That's a terrible thing to say. He's Lanse and Charlotte's son.

(Bronwen shrugs)

ADELE Well, Margaret's glad for her company, trouble or not trouble. Whatever made her agree to move out into the country. The isolation is driving her nuts.

HARRIET You've seen the house. Who could resist that? It's no less isolated here in town. The old crowd's gone. Nobody left but us.

BRONWEN Oh, Mom.

HARRIET Don't worry, I'm not going to start crying in my beer.

BRONWEN That isn't what I meant.

HARRIET Unless you want to see how fast Adele can leave the room.

ADELE Don't waste your energy. I'm going to change for bed. Where are Lorraine and Kelley?

HARRIET Lorraine's probably talked Kelley into a game of cribbage.

BRONWEN She'd better watch herself. Kelley can be ruthless.

HARRIET See if the men want a beer, Adele?

ADELE This isn't Three Rivers Stadium. They can fetch their own beer.

(Adele exits)

HARRIET You're fond of Adele, aren't you, Bronwen?

BRONWEN Yes.

HARRIET So am I. We've been friends a long time. Since before air conditioning.

BRONWEN She told me you wanted to be an actress.

HARRIET Didn't we all? It comes with adolescence, like poetry and pimples. She hates Mason, you know. "Stultifying" is one of her more flattering descriptions.

BRONWEN The town's changed. Every time I come back it's a shock. I never expect it.

HARRIET It's all the new factories. They started moving in after the Korean War. Everything was different after that.

BRONWEN I remember when you could stand in the front yard and see fields at the end of our block. Or am I crazy?

HARRIET They were there. Before they built that Fairview development.

BRONWEN On summer nights you and Margaret would sit on the glider on the side porch and talk and talk. I'd fall asleep to the sound of your voices.

HARRIET I wonder what happened to that old glider. I guess we gave it away.

BRONWEN Maryann and I'd ride our bicycles out in the country and look for salamanders in the creek. They filled that creek in, didn't they?

HARRIET Yes.

BRONWEN Remember the old haunted house?

HARRIET You girls would go there and scare yourselves half to death.

BRONWEN One Halloween you dressed up in Dad's old raincoat and hat and big black galoshes, and jumped out at us.

HARRIET I thought you were going to die. I didn't have the heart not to tell you it was me.

BRONWEN You and Margaret would walk through the fields at dusk in the summertime. We'd follow you, sneaking behind the wild rose hedges, spying. Did you know we were there?

HARRIET You kids were as subtle as a herd of elephants. And you giggled incessantly. Odd, isn't it, how mostly one remembers the summers?

BRONWEN I used to love the way the dirt roads smelled when they were freshly oiled. That smell still makes me think of August.

HARRIET You had the most uncanny knack of knowing when the seasons were turning. One day you'd say, "It's over, Mom." And, sure enough, within a week there'd be frost.

BRONWEN It's a dryness in the air.

HARRIET The way you could read the weather was almost frightening.

BRONWEN I thought you could read my mind. That *was* frightening.

HARRIET You were always so transparent. Poor baby, you couldn't lie to save your life.

BRONWEN (Pause) Mom, may we stay?

HARRIET Yes.

BRONWEN And Kelley? Here?

HARRIET If that's how it has to be.

BRONWEN Thank you. She's really a very nice person, Mom.

HARRIET I'd better see if the men want anything. (Exits)

ADELE (Entering) Where's Harriet?

BRONWEN Looking after her boys.

ADELE What happened?

BRONWEN I said the wrong thing. Surprise.

ADELE What did you say?

BRONWEN That I want Kelley to stay here.

ADELE Of course she's going to stay here, unless you mean permanently.

BRONWEN Not permanently.

ADELE Is she going on about that again? She's a fanatic on the subject.

BRONWEN She didn't go on about it. She left the room.

ADELE Bronwen, your mother is my oldest and dearest friend. At times, she is also my most irritating friend.

BRONWEN It's nothing new.

ADELE Neither is that "I don't want to talk about it" attitude of yours.

BRONWEN Forgive me, Adele. I'm just worn out. I haven't even asked how you've been.

ADELE I'm fine. One of the advantages of being my age is you don't have to give a damn what people think. One of the disadvantages is you don't have the energy to give them much to think about.

BRONWEN I'll bet you manage.

ADELE Can't let the kids get complacent.

BRONWEN Mother wanted me to be good friends with Laura. I'm sorry I wasn't.

ADELE You hardly saw each other. Besides, what did you have in common? She's too conventional.

BRONWEN Mother wanted it.

ADELE Oh, don't be maudlin. It's too much on top of Christmas. Your mother wanted you to be friends with everybody. No selectivity.

BRONWEN Do you get along with your kids, Adele?

ADELE Yes. Oh, Laura gets a little boring with her constant golf talk. And Hank's preoccupied with his relentless climb up the corporate ladder. Thank God Jean's unpredictable. But I'm proud of them.

(Bronwen sighs)

ADELE (Gently) I've always loved you for your sensitivity, Bronwen. But self-pity makes me want to throw up.

BRONWEN You're right. Your kids are lucky, Adele.

ADELE Not to hear them tell it. At least once a week I get a frantic phone call. "Mother! One of my friends saw you coming out of a yoga class. No one your age takes yoga." Or Hank: "Mother, I heard you signed up for an Outward Bound weekend. I hope you realize how that looks, Mother." If he ever runs for public office, he'll probably have me locked up.

BRONWEN Doesn't anything bother you?

ADELE Growing old bothers me. Dying bothers me. Knowing some day I won't be able to take yoga classes or go on Outward Bound weekends bothers me. Seeing people I love become bitter and calcified bothers me. Most nights I don't sleep well. Some nights I don't sleep at all. Sometimes I wake in the middle of the night and think, just for a second, that Todd is there with me. After five years, I still forget he's dead. Then the truth comes to me, like steel. Such a cruel second. Hang onto what you love, Bronwen. Once it's gone, you can never get it back.

BRONWEN I love Kelley. (Pause) I love my mother.

ADELE So do I. That's why we're here.

(Lorraine and Kelley enter)

LORRAINE Why didn't you warn me not to play cribbage with her?

KELLEY You didn't do badly.

LORRAINE I don't need reassurance. I need sympathy. (Harriet enters) Are they still at it down there? Tom's not going to have a brain left in his head.

HARRIET He's on vacation. Indulge him. Kelley, why don't you stay here tonight? They're forecasting snow. We wouldn't want you to be stuck in the motel for Christmas. You can share the guestroom with Adele.

BRONWEN (After a shocked silence) And what's Santa bringing you?

(Bronwen crosses to the bar and mixes herself a drink)

LORRAINE (Crossing to her) Make me one, too, Bron?

(Bronwen shakes her head, puts down her glass, and runs from the room)

KELLEY (Exiting after her) Excuse me.

(Lorraine stands about uncomfortably. Adele motions her out. Lorraine takes Bronwen's drink and exits after her)

ADELE Harriet, how could you do that?

HARRIET Go to bed, Adele.

ADELE Harriet.

HARRIET I have presents to wrap.

ADELE How could you do it?

HARRIET (Snaps) Don't you know what they are?

ADELE Of course I know.

HARRIET They think they can flaunt it. In *my* house.

ADELE I don't think they feel much like flaunting anything right now.

HARRIET I suppose that Kelley person couldn't wait to tell Lorraine.

ADELE Oh, Harriet, no one has to tell Lorraine anything. Do you think she cares?

HARRIET If Charlotte ever finds out she'll ruin me. How am I supposed to explain Kelley's being here?

ADELE She's Bronwen's friend.

HARRIET Charlotte's too shrewd for that.

ADELE What do you think they're going to do? Rip off their clothes and make love in the middle of the floor?

HARRIET Don't be crude. Charlotte will ask questions, just you wait.

ADELE To hell with Charlotte.

HARRIET You don't understand how powerful she is.

ADELE Charlotte's a paper tyrant.

HARRIET She's my friend.

ADELE Only as long as you kiss her feet. Or other, less mentionable portions of her anatomy.

HARRIET I don't know what Frank's going to say.

ADELE Then tell them to leave.

HARRIET People will wonder why Bronwen's not here.

ADELE Make something up. You're good at that. My God, Harriet. You worry about Charlotte. You worry about Frank. You probably worry about the paper boy. When are you going to start worrying about your daughter?

HARRIET Bronwen's been a worry to me from the day she was born.

ADELE Oh, really. Don't take that self-righteous tone with me, Harriet. I've known you too long. Aren't you ever going to let up?

HARRIET Bronwen's too damn sensitive for her own damn good.

ADELE You're her mother. For once in your life, *be* her mother.

HARRIET Exactly what's that supposed to mean?

ADELE It's easy to be a mother when they're little and cute. You can dress them as you like and show them off, and everyone makes a big fuss over them. But when they get older, and they aren't exactly what you'd planned, or if they're different from other people in some way—that's when they need you the most.

HARRIET It's easy for you to criticize.

ADELE Because my children are *Good Housekeeping* centerfolds? Oh, Harriet, the times I've envied you.

HARRIET Because of Bronwen?

ADELE Because of Bronwen

HARRIET That's absurd.

ADELE Listen to yourself! You think I'm absurd because I love your daughter. Do you love her?

HARRIET Of course I do. I'm her mother.

ADELE Nobody loves someone just because she's a mother. Do you love Bronwen?

HARRIET I love my daughter.

ADELE Do you love Bronwen?

HARRIET She was such a strange child. She never wanted to do what other children did.

ADELE Considering what other children do, you're probably lucky.

HARRIET It was agony to get her to go to a party. She always had her nose in a book, when she wasn't with Maryann.

ADELE What's so terrible about that?

HARRIET She never even wanted to go to the circus.

ADELE She was afraid of the clowns. Have you ever taken a good look at a clown? You'd be afraid, too. I was along the day Frank took you to the Central Park Zoo. You were so upset you threw up, right in front of everyone.

HARRIET It was the smell.

ADELE It was the cages, the way the animals paced in their cages. You wanted to sneak back at night and turn them loose.

HARRIET I was being silly.

ADELE That's what Frank said. "Like a damn woman," I believe, were his exact words.

HARRIET Well, he was right.

ADELE Do you mean that? (Pause) You've changed in forty years.

HARRIET I should hope so.

ADELE This marriage has taken something from you. This town has been hard on you.

HARRIET Did you come here to criticize me?

ADELE I came because I'm your friend. Because we've been friends a long time. Before you met Frank, before I met Todd. Because we bummed around New York together, and pooled our money during the hard times. Because we were crazy together, and sad together. Because we love each other.

HARRIET I'm sick of all this talk of love.

ADELE Well, then, I'm sorry. Because it's what I bring you, and it's what Bronwen brings you. And it's what Frank would never give you. Good night, Harriet.

HARRIET Good night, Adele

(Adele exits to hallway. Harriet moves toward unwrapped gifts, turns away wearily. Kelley enters hesitantly)

KELLEY Mrs. Sibley, could I talk to you for a minute?

HARRIET Now what is it, Kelley?

KELLEY Should I take her away from here?

HARRIET Do as you like.

KELLEY I'm afraid for her. (Pause) Every time she visits here she comes home touchy and irritable. We used to have terrible fights before I realized what it was.

HARRIET (Crosses to window and looks out) The weather reports were right. It's beginning to snow.

KELLEY After a few days she takes the boat out. Not to fish. She doesn't come home until after dark. She could get lost out there in the dark.

HARRIET Yes.

KELLEY Once, when she came back . . . her hands were cut and bleeding. She wouldn't talk. She cried all night. I went down to the boat the next day. She had broken all the lobster traps with her bare hands. (Pause) I love her, Mrs. Sibley.

HARRIET (Pause) So do I.

KELLEY I want to do the right thing.

HARRIET I know you do, Kelley. We all want to do the right thing. Maybe someday they'll tell us what the right thing is. (Sighs) Forgive me, Kelley. I'm old, and I'm tired.

KELLEY Good night, Mrs. Sibley. (Starts to exit)

HARRIET Kelley. Thank you for talking to me.

(Kelley exits. Harriet stands at the window as the sound of the TV rises. Blackout)

SCENE 2: Christmas morning. Wrapping paper and presents are scattered around. The TV is blaring. Kelley and Harriet are looking at a photo album. Bronwen and Adele are picking up the Christmas fallout. Maryann is watching, drinking coffee.

HARRIET She was about two in this one. That's Frank's mother in the background.

KELLEY Bron looks so distressed.

HARRIET She was hot-footing it across the yard to me. Her grandmother always made her uneasy.

KELLEY I can see why. She's a terrifying-looking woman. Did she ever smile?

HARRIET Not in recorded history. And she didn't like children. That's why Frank was an only child.

ADELE I thought it was because she didn't like sex. Tried it once and didn't like it. Hand me the wastebasket, Bronwen.

HARRIET This was her first day at kindergarten. She hated it. She made such a fuss they had to call me to come get her.

BRONWEN Mom, please.

HARRIET Well, you did. (Turning pages) This was in first grade. Easter, I think. Isn't that little dress adorable? Look at that lace collar. And the patent leather shoes, and little gloves with a tiny pearl button at the wrist.

KELLEY She has curly hair.

HARRIET I'd given her a perm. Doesn't she look like a little doll?

BRONWEN Honest to God, Mom.

HARRIET Then she went and spoiled it all with that frightful scowl. We have hundreds of pictures of her, and not one smiling.

KELLEY Why is that?

HARRIET She hated having her picture taken.

ADELE (To Bronwen) Does Lorraine need help with the dishes?

BRONWEN I offered, but she said she wanted to be alone. Mom, what's wrong between her and Tom?

HARRIET They're just going through a period of adjustment. You know Lorraine. She always bounces back. Here's one of you and Bronwen, Maryann. When was it?

MARYANN (Looking) That summer Mom and I went to the shore with you.

BRONWEN We were only about six then, weren't we?

MARYANN Seven. Remember the day Bronwen wandered off down the beach looking for shells and you thought she'd drowned?

HARRIET (Laughs) I had all the lifeguards running in circles blowing their whistles. My God, didn't we cause confusion?

MARYANN You tried to get the Coast Guard to start dragging the Atlantic.

KELLEY (To Bronwen) The Coast Guard must have a permanent file on you.

HARRIET Then here she came, strolling up the boardwalk as unconcerned as you please.

MARYANN Mom claims you were so upset she had to get a babysitter and take you bar-hopping.

HARRIET That was our excuse. We really wanted to get away from limp bathing suits and water-logged children.

MARYANN Well, she's a tiger about my kids. If I so much as look at them cross-eyed, she threatens to call Protective Services.

BRONWEN What does she think about your divorce?

MARYANN You know Mom. She loves a good fight. Especially with Charlotte.

BRONWEN How are *you* doing?

MARYANN Laying low. Every now and then I put in an appearance at the A & P, to keep the gossip alive. Marriage. Why do they make it so easy to get in, and so hard to get out?

BRONWEN I've never had that problem. One of the advantages of an alternative lifestyle.

HARRIET Bronwen . . .

MARYANN Don't worry, Harriet. I've heard of alternative lifestyles.

BRONWEN Don't let it get out. It might tarnish your reputation.

MARYANN My reputation's already tarnished. I walked out on Thanksgiving. When this is over maybe I'll liberate the Mason housewives, move up your way, and start a colony.

BRONWEN Don't bring Charlotte.

MARYANN It would take dynamite to blast the Empress of Lansing Jute off her throne.

KELLEY Lansing *Jute*?

BRONWEN They make carpet backings. I told you, didn't I?

KELLEY It went past me. Jute.

BRONWEN Very sexy stuff, jute. (To Maryann) Do you think you'll stay in Mason?

MARYANN God, no. Once you're on Charlotte's hit list, it's all over.

ADELE Would you like more coffee, Maryann?

MARYANN No, thanks. I'd better get going before Frank comes up for air.

BRONWEN Why?

MARYANN I'm allowed in the house, but only in the kitchen.

HARRIET Maryann, that's not true.

MARYANN I heard him say it, Harriet. It's okay. I was raised on Mason politics. It was nice meeting you, Kelley. I'd probably feel I knew you already, if Bron ever bothered to write.

KELLEY Don't take it personally. I do well to get her to make a list of what she needs from the store.

HARRIET She managed to write a Master's thesis.

BRONWEN That was it for this lifetime.

MARYANN (Getting ready to go) Come out to the house later. Mom would love to see you both. Merry-Kiss-My-Ass.

ADELE Don't forget to use the service entrance.

(Maryann exits to dining room)

BRONWEN He makes her stay in the *kitchen*?

HARRIET He was only kidding.

BRONWEN My father never kidded in his life. That bastard.

KELLEY Watch it, Bron.

HARRIET Don't talk like that on Christmas.

BRONWEN Mom, Maryann's my friend. How can he do that?

HARRIET You don't live here anymore, Bronwen.

ADELE Maryann understands. You know how Charlotte is about taking sides.

BRONWEN Honest to God, the things that go on in this town.

HARRIET It isn't any concern of yours what goes on in this town. You've made it perfectly clear you don't want anything to do with it.

BRONWEN You're the one who was always telling me to get out. One of my earliest memories is of you leaning over my crib whispering, "Good night, Bronwen. Get out of Mason."

HARRIET Well, I certainly got my wish.

ADELE There's no place like home for the holidays.

HARRIET Bronwen, when you see Charlotte, remember to turn on the charm.

BRONWEN I hadn't planned on seeing her.

HARRIET She'll be here this afternoon.

BRONWEN We're going out to Maryann's this afternoon.

HARRIET You can go later. She wants to see you.

BRONWEN Why?

HARRIET I don't know.

BRONWEN Mom, I'm not about to spend the day waiting for Lady Bountiful to grace us with her Christmas visit.

HARRIET You're putting me in a very difficult position.

ADELE Bronwen, don't you think you could yield a little on this?

HARRIET Is it so much to ask? For my sake?

BRONWEN I hope Maryann takes Charlotte's precious grandchildren and moves to Alaska.

HARRIET Maryann doesn't stand a snowball's chance in hell of getting custody.

KELLEY Why not?

HARRIET Money talks. Charlotte could buy the Pope if she wanted him.

KELLEY I thought everyone in Mason was Lutheran.

HARRIET That's why she hasn't bought the Pope. It'll kill Margaret to lose those grandchildren.

BRONWEN Isn't there something you can do, Mom?

HARRIET I can't imagine what.

BRONWEN You know Maryann. You know she's a good mother.

HARRIET Of course she's a good mother. A little unconventional by Mason standards, of course. Routine isn't her highest goal in life.

BRONWEN You're going to help, aren't you?

HARRIET I really don't know what I can do.

BRONWEN Testify or something!

ADELE The hearing's a long way off. Anything can happen by then.

BRONWEN Sure, Charlotte can have a fatal attack of compassion. Mom?

HARRIET We'll just wait and see, shall we?

BRONWEN What if Margaret asks you . . .

HARRIET Oh, she wouldn't do that.

BRONWEN Mom!

KELLEY *Bronwen!*

BRONWEN All right, I'm sorry. But I'll be damned if I'm going to sit here and dance attendance on Her Majesty.

ADELE (**Sharply**) Bronwen! (**Quietly but firmly**) I think you should stay and see Charlotte.

HARRIET Just this once. I won't ask you again.

BRONWEN All right, all right.

HARRIET And wear that nice dress I gave you.

BRONWEN Mother!

HARRIET You'll need some decent shoes. Lorraine probably has some that'll fit you.

BRONWEN All *right*.

ADELE Come on, Harriet. Let's help with the dishes.

HARRIET Lorraine doesn't want help.

ADELE She's brooded long enough.

(**Harriet and Adele exit to dining room**)

KELLEY It's only a little thing, Bron.

BRONWEN Don't *you* start.

KELLEY I'm sorry.

BRONWEN This is how it always is. "Do this one little thing for me." "Tell one little lie." "Kiss one little ass." "It won't hurt you to do this one little thing. I won't ask you again." Not until the next time, and the time after, and the time after.

KELLEY I *am* sorry, Bron.

BRONWEN I know. Jesus, if I did what she wanted I felt like a fool, and if I didn't I felt like the meanest bastard around. I went to parties for her. Parties! I don't even *like* parties. And I had to *enjoy* them. She'd ask me if I had a good time, and if I said "no" — which was usually the case — she'd get this disgusted, *wounded* tone in her voice and start in on how I was dull and stupid and God knows what.

KELLEY Bron, that's so crazy.

BRONWEN I'd come home on vacation from college, and she'd have a stack of phone calls a foot thick for me to make. Anyone who asked about me, just to be polite — on the street, anywhere — if they asked about me I had to call them. And if someone stopped by, "Come say hello, Bronwen. Put on something pretty. Turn on the charm." She'd have me dressing up for the milkman if she could.

KELLEY You don't have to do that anymore.

BRONWEN Don't I? I'm doing it now.

KELLEY Bron . . . (Goes to touch her)

BRONWEN Not here! Somebody might come in.

KELLEY (Sadly) Oh, Bronwen.

BRONWEN I'm sorry.

(Harriet and Adele enter)

HARRIET We're going up to dress for church. I don't suppose . . .

BRONWEN No, Mother, we are *not* going to church.

HARRIET Well, you'll have the house to yourselves. Be sure to turn off the tree if you go out. (Exits)

BRONWEN She's more afraid of Charlotte than she is of God.

ADELE You think I let you down, don't you?

BRONWEN (Withdrawing) No.

ADELE You were on the verge of saying things . . . It didn't seem worth losing the war to win the battle. (Exits)

BRONWEN Play the game, Adele.

KELLEY She's right, you know.

BRONWEN What?

KELLEY If you keep on like this, the whole thing's going to blow up in your face.

BRONWEN She started it.

KELLEY Then *you* stop it. Some things are hard for her. Try to go a little easy. (Bronwen gives her a suspicious look) And don't look at me like that. I'm on your side. Say the word and I'll rip this place apart splinter by splinter. As a matter of fact, that's not such a bad idea.

BRONWEN Darn it, Kelley, you always know how to make it better.

KELLEY I've had a lot of practice. I love you, you know. I've loved you since the first time you walked into the restaurant looking for red tide.

BRONWEN I thought you didn't believe in love at first sight.

KELLEY The second time, then. Or the third. You managed to drop in every day for two weeks.

BRONWEN We were very serious about red tide at the Institute.

KELLEY I want this to work out for you, Bron, because you want it. But if it doesn't, you'll never be unloved.

BRONWEN You're not getting bored with me? After all this time?

KELLEY Bored with you? I may have ulcers before I'm forty, but not bored.

BRONWEN (Crosses to window and looks out) It's snowing harder. Nothing's moving. The snow makes everything so quiet. (Pause) I used to love this town. Sometimes, at night, I'd sneak out after everyone had gone to bed and walk. Across the square, down the alleys, through the park. There's a fountain in the park, covered with swans and cupids and half-naked women. They turn it off at night. It sits there in the moonlight, dark and silent. Night's when you can feel a town.

KELLEY I'd like to know your town.

BRONWEN It might be gone. My God, those houses are closed in on themselves. They have the shades pulled. It looks like death. (Pause) We're very furtive about Christmas in this town. That's why we don't allow outsiders. Secret, *family* things are going on.

KELLEY What kind of place is this, anyway?

BRONWEN Families. Even the houses are complacent. They sit there on their smug lawns, under their smug maples. No one allowed in. No one allowed out. Sundays were the worst. I always felt trapped on Sundays. I *was* trapped. *Father* wanted the family together on Sundays.

KELLEY What for?

BRONWEN So he'd have an audience in case he generated a thought? Who knows? We'd go to church, where we'd be reminded of how lousy and rotten we were for being alive. The First Deadly Sin in the Lutheran Church is joy. The Second is self-esteem. When we got home we'd all go to different rooms and wait.

KELLEY Wait?

BRONWEN For the day to be over. There was a kind of lethargy that would come over me on Sundays. I'd sit there and wait. (Pause) Christmas is the ultimate Sunday. (Pause) They're all crouching behind their drawn shades, performing Satanic family rites.

KELLEY Bronwen, you're making me a little uneasy.

BRONWEN Promise me something. Don't go to sleep after dinner. Don't leave me here alone.

KELLEY I don't think I could sleep, anyway, after this.

BRONWEN Everyone falls asleep in this house after Christmas dinner. Everyone except me. That's when the silence creeps in. That's when you can feel the evil. (Pause) I'm afraid of it. You hear the house breathing. You see the dust drifting through beams of sunlight. And after a while a low humming begins in your head. And you know you'll never get away from here. Never.

KELLEY We'll get away.

BRONWEN (Pulling herself out of her mood) Come on. Let's take a walk.

KELLEY Are you sure I won't be shot on the street? I'm an outsider.

BRONWEN I'll protect you. They think I'm one of them.

KELLEY My hero. Somehow a clove of garlic around the neck seems more appropriate.

(They exit, to the hall. Dimout for passing of time. Adele and Harriet enter through the front door, brushing off snow)

HARRIET Bronwen! Bronwen! I told her not to go out and leave the lights on.

ADELE It looks as if we're in for it. What do you think, three inches already?

HARRIET I hope they're not driving around in that ridiculous car of hers.

ADELE It's in the driveway. I imagine they took a walk.

HARRIET That's typical of her, going off without saying a word to anyone. Leaving everyone to worry.

ADELE Harriet, are we talking about the same person? That woman who's running around the house calling you "Mother"?

HARRIET Don't be silly.

ADELE You set her up to disappoint you, you know. You ask her to do things she can't possibly do, and reject her when she doesn't do them.

HARRIET For example?

ADELE That business about Charlotte.

HARRIET I fail to understand what is so difficult about a few minutes of polite conversation.

ADELE It's more than that, and you know it. You want her to lick Charlotte's boots. And that's one thing Bronwen's never been able to do.

HARRIET It isn't so hard.

ADELE It is for her. I've seen her try, to please you. She could make life a lot easier for herself if she could do it. It just isn't in her.

HARRIET I'm a little fed up with hearing about Bronwen's fragile ego. She does what she wants. I was under the impression you sided with me.

ADELE I thought she should avoid another argument. I was wrong. You humiliated her.

HARRIET That's exactly what I mean. How can you be humiliated over a few minutes of conversation? What can you do with someone like that?

ADELE I give up.

HARRIET You don't live here, Adele. You don't appreciate the politics in this town.

ADELE What's so earth-shatteringly important about that dress?

HARRIET I want her to look nice.

ADELE It's all wrong for her. She never wears clothes like that.

HARRIET It won't kill her. I only hope that other woman brought something decent. It would be like them to show up in filthy blue jeans.

ADELE Harriet, what's happened to you? All those months between my visits—what happens?

HARRIET Nothing happens. I live my life, you live yours.

ADELE You call this a life? With Frank? Frank sits at the dinner table like a king. If he wants something he points to it. Points to it! There are four things I've never heard Frank say: Please, thank you, I was wrong, and I'm sorry. Has he ever said those words to you?

HARRIET His mother spoiled him.

ADELE That old lady was as selfish as he is.

HARRIET His father died when he was young.

ADELE They probably poisoned him. Those two had a relationship that would have curled Freud's toes.

HARRIET The years have certainly loosened *your* tongue, Adele.

ADELE I suppose they have. I'm sorry, Harriet. I'm as rude to you as you are to Bronwen. And I can't even claim the excuse of being your mother.

HARRIET If you were my mother, we'd have been run out of town long ago. The way we were kicked out of that hospital job.

ADELE What was it we did, anyway?

HARRIET *You* threw a party on the geriatric ward. With spiked punch.

ADELE *I* did? You engineered the whole thing.

HARRIET Nonsense. I was on maternity.

ADELE Not that night. My God, didn't we get those old folks soused? I hope someone does that for me when I'm in my dotage.

HARRIET (Laughs) We could have landed in jail.

ADELE That would have been the end of your engagement to Frank.

HARRIET Lord, yes. Can't you see the look on the Dowager's face? Her jowls would have trembled like jello.

ADELE We raised a little hell in our time, didn't we? We've been good friends through the years.

HARRIET We have indeed. Let's be wicked. Let's have a drink. To friendship.

ADELE So soon after church? Whatever would Frank say?

HARRIET Who cares what Frank says? He's still out at the cemetery, anyway. Maybe he'll get stuck in the snow. Hang up my coat, will you? I'll get the ice. And I'd better put some beer in the fridge in the family room.

ADELE Tom and Lorraine can do it when they finish shoveling the driveway.

HARRIET I'd better. They might forget.

ADELE Harriet, when are you going to make peace with Bronwen?

HARRIET When she decides to make peace with me.

ADELE Honest to God! You're cut from the same mold, you two. (Exits)

HARRIET (Laughing) Up yours, Adele.

(Bronwen and Kelley enter)

BRONWEN Mother!

HARRIET Cover your ears. You're too young.

BRONWEN I think so!

HARRIET Children are such prudes.

BRONWEN Have you been drinking?

HARRIET We're just about to start. Join us? Kelley?

KELLEY Thank you.

BRONWEN How was church?

HARRIET You should know. They haven't changed the service in forty years.

BRONWEN Does Carrie Kramer know all the words to "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring" yet?

HARRIET Give her thirty more years. Of course, there are a few cracks in the upper register. And she still has that sour puss on her. You'd think "Jesu" was a dead rat.

BRONWEN Remember the year you leaned over to me, right in the middle of the solo, and said, "She looks like she didn't get nuttin' for Christmas"?

HARRIET She was pausing for breath, and everyone in the church heard me.

BRONWEN We almost didn't get nuttin' for Christmas that year. Dad was livid.

KELLEY Bron, you'd better give me your coat. You're dripping on everything.

BRONWEN God forbid I should stain the orientals. They belonged to Her Eminence. (Kelley takes their things and exits) How come you and I were always in trouble, and Tom never was?

HARRIET Tom's like his father. No imagination.

BRONWEN Where is Dear Old Dad?

HARRIET At the cemetery, of course.

BRONWEN I should have guessed. You know what he does out there, don't you?

HARRIET He checks to see that no vandals have hurt the graves. We've had a problem . . .

BRONWEN He goes to worship his dead mother.

HARRIET Bronwen!

BRONWEN He worshipped her while she was alive, and he worships her dead. I wonder what the two of them talk about.

HARRIET Money.

BRONWEN Does he still go twice a week?

HARRIET Sunday and Wednesday.

BRONWEN He's probably afraid she'll climb out of there and come get him if he doesn't.

HARRIET Bronwen, promise me something. When I die, promise me you won't let them bury me next to her.

BRONWEN I'll pull you out of there with my bare hands if I have to.

HARRIET I caught her looking in his checkbook once.

BRONWEN Really?

HARRIET I'd suspected it for some time. You know how he keeps it on the shelf in the downstairs lavatory? Well, it occurred to me she spent an awful lot of time in there. More than necessary. Unless she had problems I didn't know about — which was unlikely, since her favorite topic of conversation was her input and output.

BRONWEN Really, Mom.

HARRIET Well, just before one of those deadly weekly dinners, I draped a tiny bit of thread over the edge of the book. Then, as soon as she had left the lavatory, I went in and checked, and it was gone. I waited until we were all at the dinner table, and I said, "Frank, I've suspected that someone has been reading your checkbook, so I set a trap." Then I told them about the thread. Her face was purple!

BRONWEN My God, what did she say?

HARRIET What *could* she say without giving herself away?

BRONWEN What about Dad?

HARRIET Guess.

BRONWEN Humph!

(They both collapse in laughter. As they are getting control, Bronwen breaks down again)

HARRIET Now what?

BRONWEN I was just picturing her . . . with that perpetual scowl . . . in her black dress and sensible shoes . . . pouring over his checkbook . . . sitting on the toilet.

HARRIET With her pants around her knees!

BRONWEN You should have yelled "Fire!"

(They have another fit)

HARRIET You'd better dress. Charlotte will be here soon.

BRONWEN (Pause) Mom, I'm not going to do it. I'll be here, and I'll be polite. But I won't wear that dress.

HARRIET Not even for me?

BRONWEN Mom, I'll feel ridiculous. I'll *look* ridiculous. Can't I . . .

HARRIET I ask you to do one little thing for me. One little thing.

BRONWEN It's not a little thing, Mom.

HARRIET You shouldn't worry about looking ridiculous. You *are* ridiculous.

(Harriet exits to dining area. Kelley enters)

BRONWEN Damn it all to hell! God *damn* it!

KELLEY What's the matter?

BRONWEN I told her I wouldn't wear the dress.

KELLEY Big deal.

BRONWEN All right, she wins. I'll do what she wants. I'll do anything she wants.

KELLEY Bron . . .

BRONWEN I'll fawn over Charlotte. I'll turn on the charm. I'll tell the lies. I'll wear the dress.

KELLEY Do what you feel you must, Bron, but don't . . .

BRONWEN I never should have told her the truth about me. But I hated lying and pretending and making up imaginary boyfriends. It made me feel so far away from her. I was terrified to tell her. I kept putting it off. All summer vacation. Every morning I'd promise myself I'd do it today, and every night

I'd hate myself because I hadn't been able to. The night before I went back to Cornell I sat down at the kitchen table with her. We were drinking coffee. I'd start to tell her and my throat would close up. Or I'd find myself changing the subject. Finally, I fell apart and it all came out. She looked at me, put her cup down, walked to the sink, and threw up.

KELLEY That was a long time ago.

BRONWEN She used to love me. Isn't that a laugh, Kelley? When I was little she read to me. For hours. I'd sit on her lap and she'd read to me. I'd go out in the fields and pick wildflowers and bring them to her. They were terrible, all wilted and drooping. Half the time they were nothing more than weeds. She'd take those half-dead, scrunched-up weeds and put them in her best vase. Right there in the middle of the mantel.

KELLEY God damn it, let's get out of here!

BRONWEN I was her little girl. Is that what she wants me to be, Kelley? Her little girl? Because if that's what she wants, that's what I'll be. Why the hell won't she touch me?

ADELE (Entering) Bronwen, sit down! Get a grip on yourself.

BRONWEN What am I going to do?

ADELE Bronwen, I love your mother. And I love you. You're two of the dearest people in my life. But you have to stop destroying each other. Are you listening to me? The past is the past. The good times *and* the bad. You're not her little girl anymore, Bronwen. You can't *be* her little girl. You have to go beyond the things that have happened.

BRONWEN I don't know if we can.

ADELE Then leave. Let go. (Harriet enters) Come on, Kelley. (Kelley hesitates) Kelley. (They exit)

HARRIET It's getting late. Charlotte will be here any minute.

BRONWEN (Flares up) To hell with Charlotte. (Gets control) Sorry. Mother, I hate it when we fight.

HARRIET So do I.

BRONWEN I want us to . . . care about each other.

HARRIET I care about you. I only want you to be happy.

BRONWEN But I *am*. I don't do the things you think would make me happy, so you can't believe I am. Mother, I love my life.

HARRIET You couldn't prove it by the way you act around here.

HARRIET Because we're always pushing against each other. If you'd only try to understand . . .

HARRIET I'm always the one, aren't I? Everything's *my* fault. How about someone else doing a little understanding?

BRONWEN I'd like to. If only we could *talk* to each other.

HARRIET You picked a fine time to want to talk.

BRONWEN Mother . . .

HARRIET Do you know what your trouble is, Bronwen? You've always had too much. You want everything your own way.

BRONWEN Mother, I never wanted . . .

HARRIET Upstairs there's a closet full of clothes you never wore. A trunk full of dolls you never played with. We gave you the best education money could buy. If you're not happy, don't blame me.

BRONWEN Mother, please. Help me.

HARRIET Help you?

BRONWEN Don't hate me. Don't hate what I am. Please, Mom, I need you.

HARRIET You have Kelley.

BRONWEN Kelley isn't you.

HARRIET I wanted everything to be easy for you, but you had to be different.

BRONWEN I couldn't help that.

HARRIET I don't suppose you could. Bronwen, I don't know what you want from me.

BRONWEN I need to know you love me . . . in spite of everything.

HARRIET Yes, I love you. (*Embraces her. Nervously*) Now will you get dressed? Charlotte . . .

BRONWEN I'm sick of hearing about Charlotte. "Don't do this, Charlotte wouldn't approve." "Don't do that, Charlotte wouldn't like it." She makes your decisions. She runs your life. I'll bet she picked out that damn dress.

HARRIET You shut your mouth, young lady.

BRONWEN All my life I've watched you lick her shoes. You rave about her clothes. You rearrange the furniture to suit her. I've seen you lose bridge games so she won't be in a bad mood. She designed this house. Your house. And you never said a word.

HARRIET I'm warning you, Bronwen.

BRONWEN I grew up watching you suck up to her. My mother. My mother the toady. And you wanted me to suck up to her, too. I hated it. I hated you for it. You made me go to *her* children's camps, *her* children's schools. Maybe you wanted me to be like her children.

HARRIET I told you to shut up.

BRONWEN Is that it, Mother? Did you want me to snivel and fawn like Charlotte's children? You know why they're like that, don't you? Because she beat the shit out of them. Maybe you should have done that to me, Mother. Maybe I'd be more like Claudia.

HARRIET Bronwen!

BRONWEN I know the story Charlotte put out, about that "tragic accident." But everyone knows Claudia killed herself. Is that what you want me to do?

HARRIET I've had enough of this.

BRONWEN Charlotte's kept her room just the way she left it, like a shrine. Is that what you'll do with my room, Mother? Turn it into a Goddamn shrine?

(Harriet slaps her. Bronwen falls into a chair. Throughout Harriet's speech, Bronwen slowly curls up into a tight ball)

HARRIET You listen to me, Bronwen Sibley, and you listen good. Nothing you've had in this life has been free. Your father's worked for it, and I've worked for it. Your father's had his thumb up Lanse's ass for forty years, and I've had mine up Charlotte's. So don't get highbanded with me, Bronwen. The day will come when you'll want something badly enough. And you won't just put your thumb up someone's ass, you'll stick your whole fist up. Because that's how it is, Bronwen. That's how the world works. And until you find that out, don't come around here judging me, you . . . Goddamn . . . freak.

(Harriet exits. A few moments pass. Kelley enters, goes to Bronwen)

KELLEY Bron . . .

BRONWEN I want to go home.

(Bronwen and Kelley exit. Doorbell. Lorraine enters and answers door)

LORRAINE Mrs. Lansing. Merry Christmas. (Charlotte enters) Harriet, Mrs. Lansing's here.

HARRIET (Enters) Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE Merry Christmas, Harriet.

HARRIET Let me take your coat.

CHARLOTTE I can't stay. I only wanted to drop off a little something for your Christmas. (Hands Harriet a gift)

HARRIET Thank you, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE It's just a little thing.

HARRIET I . . . haven't finished my wrapping yet.

CHARLOTTE Where's Bronwen?

HARRIET She must be lying down. (Calls) Bronwen, Charlotte's here. I'm sure she'll be down in a minute.

(Adele enters)

CHARLOTTE Merry Christmas, Adele.

ADELE How's the driving?

CHARLOTTE Bearable.

HARRIET (Calling) Bronwen!

CHARLOTTE I really don't have much time.

HARRIET Oh, dear. Lorraine, would you go see . . .

(Bronwen and Kelley enter with coats and suitcases)

CHARLOTTE Well, Bronwen. How about a kiss for your mother's old friend?

(Bronwen looks at her, at Harriet, and exits)

HARRIET Charlotte, this is Bronwen's friend . . .

KELLEY Goodbye, Mrs. Sibley. (Exits)

CHARLOTTE Harriet . . .

(Harriet turns to Adele)

ADELE Charlotte, I think it would be best if you . . .

CHARLOTTE Harriet?

(Unable to answer, Harriet shakes head)

ADELE (Edging Charlotte to the door) Go home, Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE Call me, Harriet. I'll be waiting. (Exits)

HARRIET Jesus, what am I going to tell her?

ADELE Tell her the truth, or tell her nothing. Who cares?

LORRAINE They're crazy . . . in this weather.

HARRIET They had to go. Some trouble at the restaurant . . . Kelley's parents . . .

ADELE Harriet and Bronwen had a fight, and they left.

LORRAINE And they're not coming back.

ADELE Some things can't be mended once they're broken.

HARRIET I hope you and Tom never have a daughter, Lorraine.

LORRAINE Harriet, Tom and I . . . You see how he is here . . . I mean, I'm only twenty-five. I don't want to spend the rest of my life . . . Oh, never mind. (Exits)

HARRIET Well! It never rains but it pours. Sure you wouldn't like to leave, too, Adele?

ADELE I'll stay a while.

HARRIET I'm never going to see her again, am I?

ADELE I don't think so.

HARRIET She was the joy of my life, once. (Pause) So now I have a husband, a son, and a Betamax. Maybe I'll get a dog.

ADELE Harriet . . .

HARRIET Frank won't miss her. I'll tell him she's queer and he'll write her off. Sibleys don't give birth to queers.

HARRIET Leave him, Harriet.

HARRIET No. I knew what Frank wanted when he married me . . . exactly what I've given him. I didn't "love" him, whatever that means. I knew he didn't love me. I knew I'd have to knuckle under to his mother and cook his meals the way she used to. I knew what this town would be like. I knew there'd be a Charlotte.

ADELE My God, Harriet.

HARRIET Frank isn't hard of hearing. He's hard of listening. He doesn't hear because he doesn't give a damn what anyone else has to say. He's going to live to be a thousand, you know. Because he hears what he wants to hear, and sees what he wants to see, and if something crosses his path that he doesn't like, he dismisses it. Bronwen knew that.

ADELE Harriet, why did you do it?

HARRIET You were never really poor, were you, Adele? Oh, we went through hard times back in New York, but you lived poor because you wanted to. You wanted to make it on your own. I always admired you for that, even though I thought you were crazy. But I lived poor because I had to. You went into nursing because you wanted to help. I did it to get away from the dirt and the hunger, and the coal dust you can never really wash off your skin. That's why I married Frank. I didn't want to die with dirt under my fingernails.

ADELE And all it cost you was Bronwen.

HARRIET All it cost me was Bronwen. I did love her, you know. I still do.

ADELE You sent her away because of a few words, spoken in anger.

HARRIET Not a few words. A lifetime of words. I gave her everything I never had, and she didn't want it. She wants to live poor, to the end of her life. And God knows that will come soon enough. Oh, she won't die with coal dust under her fingernails. She'll die with salt water in her lungs and seaweed in her hair. (Pause) When are you leaving?

ADELE I'm already packed.

HARRIET You won't stay for the party?

ADELE There's nothing to celebrate.

HARRIET Well . . .

ADELE Come with me. It wouldn't be hard. You could live the rest of your life on nothing more than the jewelry you're wearing.

HARRIET (Looks at her ring) You want to know what love is, Adele? Love is a ruby ring after forty Christmases. Thanks for the offer, but I think I'll see it through to the end.

ADELE If you ever change your mind . . . There are still a few good times left, you know. (Pause) I love you, old friend.

HARRIET Goodbye, Adele.

(Adele exits. Harriet sits in her aloneness for a while. The sound of the Betamax rises. Blackout)

THE END

Author's Afterword

I wrote RUBY CHRISTMAS several years after my mother's death, in an attempt to make sense of her life and our painfully (sometimes brutally) ambivalent relationship. Much of the play is autobiographical, although we never acknowledged my lesbianism, and we avoided the fight that would have taken us beyond the point of no return. The problem, I believe, was not so much what I was, but the context – the town, her marriage, the choices each of us made about our lives.

Over the thirty-two years that I knew her, I watched her change from a fun-loving, affectionate, unconventional, even outrageous woman into the angry, insecure, brittle Harriet of the play. When I was a child, she was my best friend. By the time I reached adulthood, we had become wary enemies. Having a conversation with her was like trying to pick up a rattlesnake. She probably felt the same way about me. When she died, I felt only relief. The sense of loss, the need to understand, came years later.

She was a victim of fear, prejudice, and childhood poverty. It is ironic that the emotional sacrifices she made to save me from a life like hers destroyed our friendship. She died of cancer, a difficult woman who had a difficult life. Writing the play enabled me to make peace with her. RUBY CHRISTMAS is dedicated to her memory.

List of Plays

THIS BROODING SKY: A LESBIAN GOTHIC ROMANCE (one act), 1978

BACKWARD, TURN BACKWARD, 1984

BASE CAMP, 1983

HOLLANDIA '45, 1983

TEN YEARS AFTER, 1985

SOUP

by
Ellen Gruber Garvey

Production History

This script was completed just prior to publication of this anthology. Thus it is available for a world premiere production.

— *The Editor*

All inquiries concerning all rights to this play should be addressed to Ellen Garvey, 36 Fruit Street, Northampton, Massachusetts 01060 until June 1986. After that date, write c/o Sally Heckel, 52 East 1st Street #4, New York, New York 10003.

Author's Notes

Scene: I've indicated a fairly realistic kitchen set in my scene description, but it's not essential to go to budget-straining lengths for realism. What *does* have to be real is the sense of kitchen and of cooking, so that the conversation and storytelling have a daily-life reality to move in and out of.

Characters: Nan and Michelle are, on the surface, very much alike—if not physically, at least in the way they talk. Their backgrounds are similar: city-raised, from Eastern European Jewish middle-class families, both with strong continuing ties (perhaps bonds is the better word) to their families. Their relationships to that background are quite different, however. Nan can be said to idealize her family and her relationship to it, while Michelle tries to make distance from hers. Nan's idealization of her own family ties casts a romantic glow over her view of Michelle's. It's important, however, that each is, in her own way, firmly tied to her family.

This play is very much about talking and listening or not listening.

It would, I think, lend itself to radio performance.

A note on pronunciation: the initial consonant of Chelm is the throat-clearing sound sometimes written as *Kh*. If you can't manage it, plain Helm would be acceptable. Hodl is roughly *huddle*, but the first vowel is somewhere between *huddle* and *coddle*, and the *u* in Fruma Feigel (which means pious bird) is the short *u* of *put*. Feigel is *Faygul*, and Reizel is *Rayzul*, with the accent on the first syllable of each.

Editor's Notes

SOUP, it seems, is a "hot potato," a difficult, "brave" and controversial script. That statement is based on the varied and conflicting responses of the six Jewish "readers" of this script. Because several of the "readers" wanted to know, I think I should point out that the playwright is Jewish.

The issues of food politics and intrusive nurturing push some very touchy buttons. As a result, this script requires a careful and informed production.

The two characters are in conflict in so many areas, and on so many levels, it may be difficult to imagine the time they were drawn to one another. It is important to bear in mind that the play starts in the middle of the end of their time together.

Also, Nan at curtain's rise is content with the way she is—the old habits have worked so far; but Michelle at curtain's rise is in the process of trying to change her old habits. Michelle has returned for one last try with Nan, or failing that, to say goodbye (though she never manages to say the word).

In my early readings of *Soup*, my sympathies went almost totally to Nan; in later readings my sympathies detoured to Michelle. To me, that means the play provides a "case" for both characters, and neither should be played as a villain. They both make mistakes.

For the amount of one-on-one talking that occurs in this script, the consistent lack of communication is stunning. This script presents a realistic reminder of the results when people don't know how to talk with or listen to each other.

This play offers no "pat" solutions, and leaves one uneasy about each character—just how long will it take each of them to find herself and *her* choices. But since life seldom presents "pat" answers, the uncertainty of each character's future, but especially Nan's, can lead a willing audience to an important self-interrogation about our old habits versus new choices.

My special thanks to Wilma Marcus for her meticulous and helpful feedback.

SOUP

CHARACTERS: Nan and Michelle, lovers, both Jewish and in their early twenties.

SCENE: Nan's kitchen, which contains an old, well-worn couch, probably bought second-hand, and also real or stage stove, refrigerator, sink, counter, and radiator. The kitchen is clearly the central room of the apartment. A cabinet is mounted on the wall above the couch. There is a closed window near the stove. (The couch and the stove are the two items of furniture the play cannot be done without.)

(Nan, wearing a flowered bib-apron over jeans and a plaid flannel shirt, is stirring soup in a large pot on the stove, waiting. She wipes steam from her glasses, wipes steam from the window, looks out, and returns to stirring and seasoning the soup.

The sound of a key in the door is heard, and Michelle enters in a wet rain poncho. She crosses to Nan and kisses her gingerly to avoid touching her with the wet poncho.)

NAN *There you are.*

MICHELLE *Just a minute.*

(Michelle goes offstage, returns without poncho, drops onto couch. She removes her wet shoes and socks, drops them on the floor, reconsiders and sets them on the radiator to dry, then limply stretches out on the couch.)

NAN (Looks under couch) *You had a pair of slippers around here somewhere.*

MICHELLE *No, I took them home, I'm pretty sure.*

NAN *Oh. Why?—Well, borrow mine then. You'll be cold.*

MICHELLE *No, don't bother (Wraps an old blanket around herself, melodramatically exhausted) God, am I hungry.*

NAN *Really? After visiting your mother? That seems bizarre somehow, against nature.*

MICHELLE *If she'd been too busy with her own life to bother cooking it would have been fine. I'd have been glad to bring my own peanut butter sandwich.*

NAN *Ha. It's just as well you're hungry. There seems to be all this food for some reason.*

(Nan gestures at the pot. Michelle watches, then shakes herself as though from a trance. She crosses to the stove to hug Nan from behind.)

MICHELLE What is it you're making? All these pots. (Points over Nan's shoulder) This pot here, that appears to contain nothing. What's in here?

NAN It's for the matza balls. Here, put water in it.

(Hands pot to Michelle, who takes it to the sink, fills it)

MICHELLE (Mock declamatory) Ah yes, matza balls. I've seen the vast fields where they ripen slowly. Amber waves of gently waving matza balls.

NAN The great steppes of California.

MICHELLE I bet I know how you make it. You cook the matza balls until the water becomes a rich broth, discard those matza balls that have lost their flavor, add a dash of this seltzer, and eat the wonderful tasty toup. An old family recipe? (Hands the filled pot to Nan) Here.

NAN That explains why my Aunt Deena's tasted so awful. I always wondered. But if you look closely you'll see there's a chicken involved here. The seltzer actually *is* for the matza balls — you put it in, my mother says it makes them lighter. Matza balls of the light matza ball school of thought.

MICHELLE My mother makes them heavy, with a surprise inside.

NAN Something substantial? A check?

MICHELLE Nuts and raisins, I think. She hasn't made it for a long time. I don't remember. (Pause) You know, when I think of it there are a lot of things she hasn't cooked in a long time. It's part of what's so upsetting. Like today, for lunch, she crams me into the kitchen and there's this plate of burnt pot roast and little bits of leftovers getting moldy. She always does it with food.

NAN Could you move over? I have to get in there. (Nan steps up on the edge of the couch to reach into the cabinet on the wall above it. She jumps down holding a box of seasoning, returns to the stove) Does what with food?

MICHELLE Uses it like that. When I dropped out of college the first time and they were so unhappy about it, they told me okay, it's your life, your problem. Then the next time I came home they were keeping a canary in my old room and all they had in the house to eat was nuts and seeds. They were on a special diet, my mother said. They kept calling me in to hear the damned bird whistle. After that I gave up playing the flute, you know, for five years. So now it's like a message: when they start stinting on the food it's clear they disapprove of something I'm doing. You know in your kitchen — it's such a familiar smell here. (Disgusted) Like relatives.

NAN (Pleased) It's like my aunt's. (Nan perches on the edge of the couch and puts her hand to Michelle's cheek) What's the matter?

MICHELLE (Startled) Nothing.

NAN (Concerned, somewhat at a loss) How can you see anything with your glasses like that?

MICHELLE Glasses? They were perfectly clean when I came in here. If you wipe them too often they get scratched.

NAN No wonder you're in such a bad mood with everything so dim and dusty in front of you. (Nan pulls her shirt tail from under her apron, leans toward Michelle's glasses) This stuff won't scratch.

MICHELLE Would you stop it?

NAN All right, all right. (Takes off her glasses, polishes them on shirt tail) See? A much more attractive world this way. (Pause) Look, I'm sorry. Okay? (Gets out chopping board, scallions, begins to chop, and stays absorbed in her work as she listens) Your folks. What were you saying about them disapproving? What do you think it is this time?

MICHELLE (Relaxing) It's pretty obvious, don't you think? When I got there it was (imitating her mother's voice) "Oh your cousin Cheryl's coming after lunch with her fiancé. This is the third one, now, it looks serious. I got so busy cleaning the house I didn't want to get it dirty again cooking. No, don't bring the pot roast in there, we'll eat in the kitchen, at the counter." I felt like some poor relation being handed food out the back door—you know, "eat the soup over the sink, it might spill."

NAN That's just terrible. Didn't you say anything?

MICHELLE My mother kept walking around with the vacuum. "He's a doctor," she says. "Cheryl's very involved. We want everything nice for when they come." The fact that I had dragged myself all the way from Brooklyn didn't count; that was expected. The point was for Cheryl to catch a husband. Then when the two of them showed up, they treated him like a king. (Michelle shakes her head)

NAN (playful) You should have brought me along. I would have told your mother not to be mean to you. (Nan brushes scallions from the chopping board into a bowl. She rests the bowl in her hands, feeling its weight, in a moment of private pleasure.

MICHELLE God knows how they would have acted if *you* came.

NAN Well, it's not as if she doesn't know about me by now, or at any rate about you. How could she miss it?

MICHELLE (Shrugging) No. The point with them seems to be that I'm not fulfilling their expectations in a negative sense—not having a boyfriend, not being married. I don't think they get any further than that. They just don't ask about relationships and I don't tell them.

NAN But what about when somebody they know asks them? They must tell the relatives something.

MICHELLE Oh, they present it as "Well, Michelle's so busy with her flute she doesn't have time for that sort of thing." I guess they really think that. It seems like an okay way to deal with a potentially tense and difficult situation.

NAN (Hefting the chopping board, as though considering its weight) And then you all politely acknowledge the potential tension and difficulty? You congratulate yourselves on your maturity in handling it so well?

MICHELLE We don't want to talk about it so we don't talk about it. Why does that give you the right to attack me?

NAN (Turns away, stares at the counter) Another goddamn roach. (Raises the chopping board, slams it down on the counter, accidentally hitting the bowl) Shit. Oh, it's cracked. It's ruined. (Takes a step, starts to slip, grabs something to steady herself, stands still)

MICHELLE (Insincerely) Oh dear.

NAN You know what the matter is? You make up your whole life for whoever's around to make it up for. You go to your parents' house and try to forget I exist, you're so busy trying to be the daughter they want.

MICHELLE That's not true. I —

NAN You pretend it's so simple—you can be one person here and another person there, as though it makes no difference. And then when you're done pretending over there you come back here and you want it to be all the same. Well, it's not. You wanted to ignore me while you were over there and now you still want to ignore me.

MICHELLE I'm not ignoring you. We've been talking. I haven't been sitting here reading the paper. Anyhow, how do you know what I did at my parents'? You weren't there.

NAN See? See what I mean? You've just been telling me what you did. You don't even care what we talk about. You don't care what I think. You don't really see me anyway.

MICHELLE Oh for god sakes. (Wipes glasses on her shirt) There, is that better?

NAN What difference does that make to me? They're your glasses. (Nan slumps on the other end of the couch from Michelle) I liked that bowl. It was my grandmother's. We used to eat matza ball soup out of them in the kitchen there. Everyone would be running around with pots in their hands, all busy. Now I just have one left.

MICHELLE I'm sorry. (Takes shoes from radiator, puts them on over bare feet. Moves to counter, examines bowl without touching it) How you can lust after your family's kitchens is beyond me. (Nan, exasperated, drums fingers on sofa arm) Look. I don't think I've been ignoring you or acting like you don't exist, even with my parents. But why should I go out of my way to make friction while I'm there? They can think what they want. It makes them happy, so why not?

NAN But they already know. Your mother isn't exactly polite to me when I answer the phone at your house at seven in the morning, you know. If you cared, you'd make things clear to them.

MICHELLE You mean if I loved you enough I'd make them accept you? Come on.

NAN If you cared enough about yourself you'd want them to accept *you*. It has nothing to do with me.

MICHELLE Then leave it alone. Can't you let me deal with it?

NAN (Silence)

MICHELLE (Pause) Come on. What is this, a campaign. We should all be one happy family? I thought being a lesbian meant I wouldn't have to put up with all that. I don't want them in my life, it's not about you. It has nothing to do with you.

NAN Why is what they want so important to you?

MICHELLE (Pleading) It's not that. I've told you what they're like. If I tell them—my mother really—she'd just take it over somehow.

NAN What, she's going to start introducing you to woman doctors, nice woman lawyers?

MICHELLE It's just that she makes everything seem so depressing. Maybe because she feels trapped. I don't know. The world seems very flat when I've been there awhile. Like when she *does* serve dinner. In the refrigerator there, all the food ends up tasting the same in ways it's not supposed to. Everything blurs into everything else.

NAN Oh. (Jarred into memory) I know what you mean. At my aunt Deena's—all those onions smelling up the farmer cheese, and garlic and everything shoving their opinions on the butter. You're right. It's unbearable.

MICHELLE I just don't want to be that exposed to her. It would only make it worse.

NAN I know what, I'll get you a big roll of plastic wrapping stuff for your birthday. Look, it still might not make it worse. It might be very different from what you think.

MICHELLE Miracles happen.

NAN I realize it's your decision. They're your parents. I know I was glad when I told my parents—

MICHELLE Yeah, but what about last week? You didn't act so superior when your mother was starting in again on "why aren't you through with this phase already"?

NAN Well, there's no insurance they won't backslide sometimes. But still, it changes what I can say—it elevates the level of discourse. And no matter what, it was worth it for the dream I had afterward that there were no closets in my apartment and all my clothes hung from a ship's steering wheel instead. Actually, it wasn't exactly like this apartment—it was sort of like yours too. (Michelle freezes)

MICHELLE How inspiring. So now you're moving your dreams into my *apartment* too?

NAN Go to hell. That was my dream and it *was* inspiring. Look, it's your business what you do about it. But you don't know how your mother would react. Maybe she'd like it. She might make you a feast — she likes to cook, you said.

MICHELLE Keep your fantasies to yourself.

NAN Why not? What annoys her about your being a lesbian is that she doesn't get to make you a wedding. Maybe she'd like to cook a nice dinner instead.

MICHELLE (Sits on couch) I can just see her doing that. That's some other mother you've got in mind there, lady. But that's okay with me.

NAN (Pause)No, it could happen. (Stretches her legs out so that her feet rest in Michelle's lap) My Aunt Reizel once told me a story about that. She used to keep a small store in Chelm where she sold chickens. You know about Chelm, right?

MICHELLE Sure. I think most of my family must have come from there. Unless there was some other town of fools closer to Lithuania. So your aunt sold chickens, huh? (Brings fingers of one hand together to make a beak, playfully nipping Nan's pant leg with it)

NAN (Lifts the beak hand, holds it) She sold other things too. But when there was an occasion, people would buy a lot of chickens. There were none of these catered affairs then, people had to cook for their own affairs — and for their serious relationships as well. And marriages — well, that was really something.

(Michelle settles in to listen. As Nan tells the following story, she gestures with her hands, but in moderation. Although she should not put on a Yiddish accent, she uses Yiddish speech rhythms and tones when appropriate)

So one time, a customer comes into my Aunt Reizel's shop. This customer, Hodl, came to order provisions for the betrothal of her daughter Fruma Feigel to Hanneh the cook. In Chelm, this was a big occasion. Just because they didn't have catering doesn't mean it was some stick-in-the-mud town with no advanced ideas, you know. "So," says Hodl. "What do you have for my daughter Fruma Feigel and for her Hanneh, she's like a daughter to me? Nothing but the best. I want only the plumpest chickens."

"For you," says Reizel, (Almost singsong) "and for your lovely daughter and daughter-in-law, may they live long and happily, whether it be monogamously or in an open relationship, as they so choose, I have only the best. Feel these chickens —"

MICHELLE (Raises her hand) I have a question. Did your Aunt Reizel really tell you all this? I can't quite see it.

NAN Always so suspicious. Of course she did. She was a remarkable woman, a wonderful storyteller. It's just that there were a few parts she didn't remember, so I have to add them. (Resumes storytelling manner) So Reizel holds up a chicken. "Blow on the feathers," she tells Hodl. "See how yellow with fat in the back. These chickens will make a soup as rich as chicken fat itself."

Now Hodl was a suspicious type, always doubting. She gets all excited. "But I want only the best for my two. For the joining of my dear Fruma Feigel to her dear Hanneh there should be nothing but her parents' glowing pride. Do you think I wouldn't spend the money for my daughter to have real chicken fat instead of something almost as good? Take away these chickens. I'll have nothing but the finest chicken fat."

MICHELLE Hey, I've heard this before. In some Jewish story book my cousin Cheryl got at camp. But it was a regular wedding.

NAN They got it wrong. That's always a problem with the oral tradition — some collector goes and asks the wrong person, and everyone forgets what really happened. (Resumes storytelling manner) Anyway, Reizel says, "Of course, for your guests at this proud time you must serve the best, that they should toast the children's happiness with proper fervor. Naturally I have chicken fat — and the best, richest chicken fat you'll find anywhere. It's as golden as the pleasure your daughter is bringing you, as golden as pure olive oil."

"Again," says Hodl. Hodl was very dramatic. "Again you want to make me ashamed before the entire community. This is my pearl of a daughter who's being married and you offer me these dregs. How can you sell me chicken fat almost as good as olive oil? Bring me the olive oil itself."

MICHELLE Somehow I get the feeling Hodl's a little ambivalent about her daughter marrying a woman.

NAN Aunt Reizel thought so too, but of course she had to sell the customer what she asked for. "Hodl," she says. "Naturally you want to give your daughter and her intended the best, no matter what your opinion of Hanneh is. If olive oil is what you want, I'm the one to buy it from. This olive oil is as clear and free of ambiguities as your intentions. This olive oil is as pure as well water."

Reizel told me she wondered, maybe she phrased it too politely. But after all, she was a storekeeper, not a family counselor. And Hodl wasn't the type to take a hint and examine her motivations. So Hodl gets huffy. "My pride in my little Fruma Feigel and my affection for her little Hanneh are only the clearest and purest. Why would I want anything but the best for them? (Rhetorically) You tell me this olive oil is almost as good as well water. How could I serve this knowing I could serve water? Bring me a barrel of the finest well water."

Reizel could see she had made up her mind, so what could she do? She called for the water carrier and Hodl walked proudly home with him rolling a barrel behind her. (Nan spreads her hands palm up in a gesture of helplessness)

MICHELLE (Smiling victoriously, stands and shakes out blanket) That's not much of a wedding feast Hodl ended up giving her daughter.

NAN Nope. Not much nourishment. While you're up, there are more scallions in the refrigerator. Your turn to chop.

MICHELLE (*Rummaging in the refrigerator*) Some celebration. It has the ring of the inevitable to it. (*Rubbing her point in*) You really can't seem to get away from it.

NAN Well, she may have meant well, even if she couldn't go through with it. Hodl had certain good qualities too, you know. But that's not really the way it ends. (*Michelle's expression changes from cheerfulness to suspicion. She begins chopping scallions. Nan crosses her arms under her apron top, stretches out further on the couch. She resumes her storytelling style*) When Hodl got home, she said to Fruma Feigel, "Look how hard I work for you. I spent all day bargaining at the store so you should see how your parents lay themselves out for your happiness." And Fruma Feigel was all ready to be grateful, she was so pleased that her mother was accepting her, her being with Hanneh. And so, although she always hated to hear about her mother's shopping trips, she made her sit down on the couch and take off her shoes; she brought her a cold glass of borscht, and said "Tell me all about it."

So Hodl said, "Remember how at your cousin's wedding we had that lovely chicken soup, rich and golden and so clear? Well, for you, nothing has been spared. I've worn my throat out shopping, and I've brought back the finest there is—a barrel of water."

MICHELLE See.

NAN Quiet. When Fruma Feigel understood that her mother planned to drink to her happiness in water, she didn't say a word but went to Hanneh's house. And that night they packed, and the next day they moved to Brooklyn. (*Nan sits up, pleased with herself.*)

MICHELLE (*Tightlipped*) Good for them. Why don't you invite them to dinner sometime?

NAN (*Cheerful, oblivious to Michelle's reaction*) We could invite them right now. Just put those scallions in. It's all done.

MICHELLE (*Raises the board to the pot, positions knife to scrape; stops, greatly irritated*) Why did you have to marry them off like that?

NAN What do you mean? They wanted to get married.

MICHELLE I don't think they did. They seemed pretty ambivalent to me.

NAN That was the mother who was ambivalent. You don't really get to see them in the story.

MICHELLE That's not what I remember. It was pretty clear to me that Hanneh and Feigel were both ambivalent. (*Sets knife back on counter and lowers scallion-covered board*) I don't think they really wanted to be married.

NAN I don't know where you get that. I mean, it was my story and that's not what I put in it. (*Authoritatively, pedantic*) Anyway, even if they were ambivalent, that means they wanted to get married too, besides wanting not to. They would want both things.

MICHELLE Well, I just don't think they wanted to get married. I don't believe it. (Sets the board with the scallions still on it on the counter. Moves to window and opens it.

NAN Then that's not ambivalence. That's decision. But really, that's not what's in the story. Why are you opening the window? It's cold out.

MICHELLE (Looking out of open window) No, it's really not bad out at all.

NAN (Quietly, a little frightened) Someone you know out there?

MICHELLE (Turns toward radiator, picks up her socks. Moving slowly as she speaks, she sits on couch and takes off one shoe at a time to put on sock and then shoe again) No, No one out there. It's something—but—I remembered now, I just remembered. I forgot something at my house.

NAN Well, what is it? Couldn't I lend you something?

MICHELLE No—I left something. I have to go home.

NAN (Understanding that Michelle is leaving, but asking anyway. Nan lifts the remaining green bowl) Don't you even want some soup?

MICHELLE No. No soup.

(Michelle exits. Nan freezes with the bowl)

NAN All this soup.

(Nan undertakes a series of abortive gestures, each time beginning with purposefulness and resolve, and breaking off in limp puzzlement:

Moves purposefully to phone, starts to dial, stops, hangs up, limp.

Moves purposefully to scallion-covered board, lifts it to take it to the soup pot; stops and retreats to limpness.

Moves to soup pot, still purposeful but more slowly. Raises a ladle full of soup; thoughtfully pours it back into the pot, as though trying to find meaning in the soup. Trails off again.

Nan stands stripped of action and purpose, holding onto herself by her apron. She looks down at apron, fingers it. In a frenzy of motion she pulls the apron off and holds it up, separate from herself, suddenly horrified by it. Drops it)

END

Author's Afterword

SOUP comes out of my interest in storytelling—both as the formal presentation of folktales and as the ongoing project of shaping the material of our lives into tellable tales. On a less theoretical plane, Soup's ingredient was my recollection of a story I'd read as a child. I recast it in lesbian terms, and thought about who would tell such a story, to whom, and why.

One way of looking at what's going on between Nan and Michelle is that they're treating each other as characters rather than people. Because they are outwardly similar, Nan believes she understands Michelle better than Michelle does: if only she'd renovate her life according to Nan's advice, Michelle would be happier. Their fight for control in their relationship is conducted through an attempt to shape each other's narrative — Nan's itch is to rewrite the story of Michelle's life: a dangerous and destructive desire.

About the Authors

Terry Baum was born in Los Angeles in 1946 to middle-class Jewish parents. She attended Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, which was a hotbed of radicalism, and became a member of the Folk Theater of the Appalachias, which attempted (unsuccessfully) to foment social revolution through theater. She graduated with a B.A. in drama in 1969 and went to study directing at Columbia University in New York. That same year, she saw the light and became a feminist. She directed for the Circle Repertory Theater and created her own small company, the Circle Players, which toured community centers and schools.

In 1972, while studying theater at the University of California at Santa Barbara, she started the Isla Vista Community Theater. There, she met Carolyn Myers, who continues to be her best friend and collaborator to this day. After receiving her M.A. in directing from U.C.S.B. in 1974, she moved to Santa Cruz to help start the Bear Republic Theater with some friends from Antioch College. While in Santa Cruz, she attended the Amazon Music Festival, where she dropped acid and had a vision of a theater composed entirely of women. She moved to Berkeley and founded Lilith, a Women's Theater, which she led for its first five years. She discovered that there were no plays for a theater composed entirely of women to do, so she and the other members of the group began to write. While she was with Lilith, they produced five plays, four of them originals that she co-wrote. *MOONLIGHTING*, a play on women and work that she co-wrote with Carolyn Myers, toured Europe to great acclaim in 1979.

Then Terry left Lilith and, with Carolyn, wrote *DOS LESBOS*, which was a big hit. In 1981, she opened her one-woman show, *EGO TRIP, OR I'M GETTING MY SHIT TOGETHER AND DUMPING IT ALL ON YOU*, which ran successfully in San Francisco and toured Northern California. Her most recent play is *IMMEDIATE FAMILY*. In the summer of 1984, she toured the country with her lover, Margo Tufo, in "The Official Lesbian Music and Comedy Act of the 1984 Olympics." Terry Baum is currently living in San Francisco, teaching playwrighting and improvisation, writing reviews, performing *IMMEDIATE FAMILY*, working on

her next play, and *still* attempting to foment social revolution through theater.

Sarah Dreher was born in Hanover, PA, a small, two-industry agricultural community not far from Three Mile Island. At the age of twelve, she was sent to a girls' boarding school near Philadelphia—a fortunate move, as she had more talent for academics than for cheer-leading. Her first play was produced in tenth grade. In retrospect, it is an embarrassment, and she refuses to divulge the title. She attended Wellesley College, where she majored in psychology. Heeding her mother's warning to "never let yourself be financially dependent on a man," she went on to take her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology at Purdue University.

The 1950s were a bad time for Communists and gays. At her boarding school, girls who were "too close" were separated; and in college she was threatened with expulsion for being "too fond of" a friend. After settling in Massachusetts, she came out during the Women's Movement of the '70s. In 1974, she was offered an opportunity to perform in a feminist musical revue, and accepted because it was completely out of character. She returned to playwrighting, and helped found Women's Community Theatre.

She is a Playwright Fellow of the Massachusetts Foundation on the Arts and Humanities, and her work has been performed by Women's Community Theatre, the People's Theatre (Cambridge, MA), Playwrights' Platform (Boston), Rhode Island Feminist Theatre, The Portland (OR) Women's Theater, and Stonewall Repertory Theater (NYC). She has written a novel, *Stoner McTavish*, a lesbian romantic suspense story, published by New Victoria Publishers, Lebanon, NH. She is a practicing psychotherapist and lives in Amherst, MA, with her lover, two dogs, and a garden which is completely out of control.

Ellen Gruber Garvey has been writing short stories for the past seven or eight years; *Soup* represents her first excursion into playwrighting. Her work has previously appeared in *Conditions* and *Sojourner*, and she is at work on a collection of short stories. She grew up in New York City, has lived in Brooklyn for most of her adult life, and is now trying to shed provincialism through temporary residence in Northampton. She is a graduate student and teacher at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

Carolyn Myers is newly born each day, I guess, because she never did submit her biographical data. Either that or she's shy. No, she's not shy. — The Editor

Mariah Burton Nelson was raised in Blue Bell (formerly Pigeon Town), Pennsylvania, moved to Arizona as a teenager and has spent most of her twenties in or near the ocean. She studied psychology, women's studies, and public health, and worked as a teacher, coach, counselor, health educator, and hospice worker before remembering what she knew at age four: that she is a writer.

Currently associate editor of *Women's Sports and Fitness* magazine, Mariah has had poetry, short stories, and articles published in over a dozen newspapers, magazines, and anthologies; this is her first play. Writing is one of the few activities she has discovered so far that she loves as much—or almost as much—as basketball. Fortunately, it's easier on the knees.

Julia Willis traces her humble origins to the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. She has never said it wasn't real pretty country around those parts, but she considers New England a much livelier if much colder place to live and work. She got a degree in English and writing from the University of North Carolina—and sure enough, that degree and 37¢ will buy her a cup of coffee. While still in North Carolina, she wrote for The-Then-You'll-Know-What-It-Means-to-be-Blue Memorial Theatre (a traveling women's comedy troupe), performed a one-woman show with her dog Eagle, and won best video entry at the North Carolina Film Festival for a comedy tape entitled *The Magic Rabbit Theatre of the Airwaves*. She was also the associate editor of Red Clay Books and an artist-in-residence for the North Carolina Arts Council.

In 1979 legend has it that Julia was coughed up by a whale on Egg Rock in the Bay of Nahant just north of Boston. Details are sketchy, but it is a certainty that her dog Eagle was coughed up at the same time by a slightly smaller whale. At any rate, they arrived safely.

In New England Julia has written for and performed with The Ends and Means Committee, received a video commission from *Center Screen* and the Massachusetts Council of the Arts and Humanities, and performed stand-up comedy in Boston, Provincetown, and some very sundry places. She writes country music, and is a member of ASCAP. In her adopted (New England) homeland she has learned all the finer points of the traditional art of bundling, but she firmly re-

fuses to assimilate completely for fear that Eagle won't recognize her anymore.

She is currently: (a) playing bass with a heavy-metal band called The Working Mothers, (b) giving birth to herself by means of re-parthenogenesis, (c) dedicating her new pen-and-pencil set in service to the language, (d) kissing the girls and making them cry, (e) running guns to Nicaragua, (f) heading for the hills, (g) all of the above, or (h) none of the above. She remains enthralled by the sublime absurdity of life and the unquenchable spirit of love.

About the Editor

Kate McDermott was born in Omaha, Nebraska, and reared the only daughter among three brothers in the midst of a lively, vocal, middle-class family. At age nine she appeared in the Showwagon Summer Series at a local park, performing "The Crooked-Mouth Smith Family" monolog. Fortunately, though Kate did not know the monolog was outrageously funny, the audience did, and they cheered, and Kate "found" the theater.

So, she went to college in Chicago, majoring in Theater Arts, graduated, and chose to avoid the martyrdom of New York Theater (the only *real* choice for theater work at that time), and went to Washington, D.C. to staff on Capitol Hill in the offices of U.S. Senators. Why? you may ask. What is the difference? "Good question," says Kate. Political assassinations and the Vietnam War and a parched spirit sent her back home to the theater "where she belonged"; and as Assistant to Artistic Director Davey Marlin Jones at the Washington Theater Club (one of the earliest regional theaters) she reluctantly shed the "rules of theater" as taught in schools, and learned to "do theater" instead.

One of the main things she "did" was to help conceive, birth, manage, and present "The New Playwrights Series" — she solicited and read between four hundred and five hundred scripts — which won a special Tony Award (The Margo Jones Award) for the Washington Theater Club.

She worked the premiere year at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, helping to get it launched.

She did summer stock at Totem Pole Playhouse with Jean Stapleton en route to Equity accreditation, decided against Equity and New York again, and moved instead to a 500-acre farm in southern Mary-

land on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay, where she watched spiders build their webs, negotiated a one-to-one non-aggression pact with the waters of the Bay, worked various pink, white, and blue-collar jobs, learned about the insatiable violence of deer hunters, played with her Irish Setters, became a fledgling feminist, and strove unsuccessfully to recover from megalopolis burnout.

Returning to the midwest – a big mistake – she found women's theater, which was not a mistake. In 1978 she wandered to California, and settled with relief in Santa Cruz County to quietly pursue women's theater as an independent director.

Kate currently supports herself in the Home Health Care field. "All my clients are over 85 years old, and are funny and flourishing."



"What one has to do usually can be done."

Eleanor Roosevelt
(1884–1962)

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The show's major pleasures are: 1) that the characters are unstereotyped, ambivalent, frequently witty individuals, and 2) that the piece frolics, scampers and practically stands on its head to avoid being a boring tract.

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—*Seattle (WA) Times*

8x10 Glossy, winner of the Theatre Rhinoceros' award.

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...weave[s] a very real woman-to-woman relationship—something not frequently seen on the stage—with candor, dignity and a touch of humor.

—*Good Times*, Santa Cruz, CA

Ruby Christmas

[*Ruby Christmas* is] ...a sensitive and realistic treatment of everyone, regardless of sexual preference, the play suggests that we all must deal with the same kinds of questions. The characters in the play are well beyond blame as the best answer. Though the play deals frankly with homosexuality, *Ruby* was very much at home in front of a mixed audience, many of whom were over 50. The script, which avoided homilies, cheap shots, and simple solutions, was packed with wit, inspired dialogue, and many beautifully sensitive portrayals.

—*The Daily Hampshire Gazette*,
Northampton, Mass.



Photo by Gypsy Ray

KATE McDERMOTT, with a Tony Award and years of directing behind her, began this book when she could not find a lesbian play she wanted to direct. *Places, Please!* is a book of seven plays by and about lesbians. Some of them are funny, some are sad, all of them are seriously lesbian. And all of them—ultimately playable.

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